A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICS OF SPACE IN THE POST-APARTHEID TOWNSHIP

by
Ayanda Avela Gasela

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Supervisor: Prof. Tina Steiner

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Declaration

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Abstract

Townships have come to be a literary trope in South African writing. The representation of this space in various genres of literature therefore is of great interest, as it offers a glimpse into the lived realities of present and former township residents. This thesis looks at the representation of townships in the Johannesburg area in three post-apartheid texts – *Dog Eat Dog* by Niq Mhlongo (2004), *The Yearning* by Mohale Mashigo (2016) and *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing* by Redi Tlhabi (2012). Each narrative offers a unique social and political perspective on the township space, surfacing its varied nature. Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*, published in the early 2000s and set in 1994, represents the township as a site of deprivation, where residents lack individual agency due to the severe economic hardships they face. Mhlongo portrays the characters who reside in the township as caught helplessly in a hostile system of economic and social lack, without the means to effect changes which would improve their lives. Mashigo's *The Yearning* engages with the township as a site of childhood memories and trauma, which have to be faced in adulthood in order for the protagonist to make sense of her life. Mashigo paints the complexity of the township space differently to Mhlongo by offering a more interior perspective on how growing up in the township has shaped the main character. According to Mashigo's novel the source of pain, as well as the resources for dealing with trauma, can be found in the township. This is similar to the angle pursued in Tlhabi's memoir *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing*, however the latter shifts focus to the significance of interpersonal relationships within the township space, which can function in nurturing or destructive ways in the lives of individuals. It represents the township as a relational space by drawing out the positive and negative implications of relationships. In this way, Tlhabi's narrative explores the fundamental impact of the township community on individual life. Together these three texts offer a view into the varying representations of this important South African literary trope, the township.

Opsomming

Townships het 'n letterkundige begrip in Suid-Afrikaanse skryfwerk geword. Die verteenwoordiging van hierdie ruimte in die verskillende genres van literatuur is dus van groot belang, want dit bied 'n blik op die lewe van huidige en voormalige inwoners van die township gemeenskap. In hierdie proefskrif word gekyk na die voorstelling van townships in die Johannesburg omgewing in drie postapartheid-tekste - *Dog Eat Dog* deur Niq Mhlongo (2004*), The Yearning* deur Mohale Mashigo (2016) en *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing* deur Redi Tlhabi (2012). Elke narratief bied 'n unieke sosiale en politieke perspektief op die township ruimte om sodoende die verskeidenheid in aard na vore te bring. Mhlongo se *Dog Eat Dog* wat in die vroeë 2000's gepubliseer is en in 1994 afspeel, verteenwoordig die gemeenskap as 'n plek van ontneming, waar inwoners nie individuele agentskap het nie weens ernstige ekonomiese probleme waarmee hulle gekonfronteer word. Mhlongo beeld die karakters wat in die township woon uit as hulpeloos en vasgevang in 'n vyandige stelsel van ekonomiese en sosiale gebrek, sonder die nodige hulpbronne om veranderinge aan te bring wat hul lewens kan verbeter. Mashigo se *The Yearning* skep die beeld van die township as 'n plek van kinderjarige herinnering en trauma wat in die protagonis se volwasse lewe gekonfronteer moet word sodat sy kan sin maak van haar lewe. Mashigo skilder die kompleksiteit van die township ruimte anders as Mhlongo deur 'n meer innerlike perspektief te bied oor hoe die grootword in die township die hoofkarakter gevorm het. Volgens Mashigo se roman kan die bron van pyn, sowel as die manier om trauma te hanteer in die township gevind word. Dit is soortgelyk aan Tlhabi se invalshoek wat gebruik word in haar memoir *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing*, maar laasgenoemde gaan oor die betekenis van interpersoonlike verhoudings binne die township ruimte, wat of op ‘n koesterende of vernietigende maniere in die lewens van individue kan funksioneer. Dit stel die township as 'n verhoudings ruimte voor deur die positiewe en negatiewe implikasies van hierdie verhoudings na vore te bring. Op hierdie manier verken Tlhabi se vertelling die fundamentele impak van die township gemeenskap op die individu se lewe. Saam bied hierdie drie tekste 'n blik op die uiteenlopende voorstellings van die kritiese Suid-Afrikaanse literêre begrip, die township.

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"For from Him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" – Romans 11:36

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

In South Africa one need only survey the major cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, or walk through the streets of a town such as Stellenbosch or Franschhoek and the elephant in the post-apartheid South African room becomes apparent – *the configuration of space* and how it continues to point to the injustices and inequalities of the past from which South Africa so deeply desires to move on. Though democracy was ushered in nearly thirty years ago, one of the apartheid legacies that haunts the South African landscape is the way in which the organization of space continues to reflect the racially segregated past; and the space of the township is perhaps its most enduring sign. Robert Rotich, Emilia V. Ileiva and Joseph Walunywa point this out in their paper on "The Social Formation of Post-Apartheid South Africa":

> Before the 1990s, Black people were relegated to townships and homelands, in accordance with apartheid's Group Areas Act, which restricted them to specific Black designated areas. These concentration camps were delineated by boundary restrictions, separating them from white productive areas. (Rotich, Ileiva and Walunywa 134).

Townships, the authors note, were a designated space for black migrant labour which was necessary for sustaining the white apartheid economy. Townships were built close enough to city centres to provide labour while still ensuring that the apartheid notion of separate development was carried out. The township in contemporary South Africa still resembles this apartheid notion of apart-ness. Townships remain on the outskirts of wealthy city centres or on the outskirts of affluent towns. Rita Barnard in *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* comments on the central role that spatial arrangements played in this history when she argues the following:

> All the essential political features of South Africa's "pigmentocratic industrialized state" were fundamentally space-dependent: the classification of the population into distinct racial categories, the segregation of residential areas on the basis of race, the restriction of black urbanisation, the system of migrant labour from rural areas to the

> towns, the emphasis on ethnicity and traditionalism, and the formidable apparatus of state surveillance and control. (Barnard 6)

Of course, this entailed a kind of irony as this notion of complete separation was undermined by apartheid's need for black labour. The need for black labour meant that segregation was not actually possible. The necessity of labour meant that there has always been a movement between the township and the parts of the city declared "white only". For this reason, the separation between the two never worked as completely as the apartheid government might have hoped:

> Those places imposed by the white government on the back majority have taken on a life of their own, rebounding on the system to its discomfort and ultimate demise. Very simply, urbanization under apartheid, no matter how carefully the state contrived to control it, has undermined apartheid itself, bringing South African society and its cities to the brink of significant if still uncertain change. (Smith 1)

In other words, the township was far more malleable than its original design intended and its inhabitants crafted within it meaningful and creative social environments that challenged the Apartheid state. Barnard notes this when she says, "[t]he fact that the disciplinary space of the township became the crucial locus of resistance in the antiapartheid struggle suggests that we need to be suspicious of totalizing models of power, of descriptions of place that ignore the transformative and creative capacities of human beings" (Barnard 7). The township space became a site of resistance through much opposition. In the 1960s, the apartheid government had used immense force to suppress black resistance in South Africa and it seemed the government had greatly discouraged black opposition organizations, especially with key leaders being forced into exile or being arrested (Hirschman 2). Black movements in South Africa seemed to be completely suppressed, that was until the 1976 Soweto Uprisings. Following the 1976 Soweto Uprisings, the township space in South Africa became more firmly established as a site of active government resistance. The Uprisings which took place in South Africa were inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement (here after referred to as BCM) which gained momentum and credibility largely in the early 70s. The BCM took its place as a movement by black people, for black people. A key ideology of the BCM an embracing of the term black which had for so long been used as a weapon to make people of colour feel inferior. The BCM used term 'black' instead to empower, the movement affirmed,

black as beautiful (Hirschmann 3 & 4). A large component of the BCM was protest writing. This writing was often in the form of poetry, and the content of this poetry (in line with affirming black life) were often written about the township as many of the writers were residents or former residents of the township. This established a link between protest writing and the township. Rotich notes how "literature took the form of "protest" writing, as anti-apartheid writers used literature to agitate against the excesses of the apartheid regime" (Rotich, Ileiva and Walunywa 139). This tradition of "protest" writing, with the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, gained particular strength in the 1980s. However, as Christopher Warnes points out, it was part of a tradition of South African writing that had existed since the 1940s (Warnes 548).

The above suggests that a large focus of South African literature during the apartheid era was apartheid itself. With apartheid coming to an end, a new era in creative production began. This posed both opportunities and challenges for South African writing. Emily S. Davis notes how this resulted in a transition period where many wondered what choices were "available to writers [since] the constraints of apartheid [had] been lifted" (Davis 797). South Africa's transition to democracy meant that writers were adjusting to new concerns in their work. Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge, in their introduction to *Writing South Africa: Literature, apartheid, and democracy, 1970-1995* note this challenge of the transitional period (Attridge & Jolly 3). Common themes of early post-apartheid writing comprised nation building and the rise of confessional narratives. These were in some sense influenced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a prominent and lengthy process of bearing witness during the transitional period in South Africa. The Commission encouraged nation-building through the sharing of stories and this influenced writing at the time (Davis 799). Moving into the post-transitional period, which describes the period after the year 2000, South African writers, according to Ronit Frenkel and Craig Mackenzie, "[h]eeded Albie Sachs's (1991) call to free themselves from the 'ghettoes of the apartheid imagination" (Frenkel and Mackenzie 1). According to them, writers began to produce "funny, acerbic, boldly satirical works" on a large variety of themes (Frenkel and Mackenzie 1). One of the three texts I have selected for analysis emerged during this post-transition era, namely Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004). My other two texts, Mohale Mashigo's *The Yearning* (2016) and Redi Tlhabi's *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing* (2012) were written later in the post-apartheid period.

This thesis explores the way in which the shifting meanings of the space of the township is conveyed in these texts, two of which are fiction and one life writing. I suggest that a literary perspective which takes the form of a narrative offers us a unique way of understanding socio-political dimensions of the township space in contemporary South Africa. Literature represents the complexities and contradictions, as well as possibilities, of life in various townships in vivid ways. The narratives shed light on the varied meanings that the characters invest into their living spaces. Literature, unlike history or geography (both of which could have been used to analyse the politics of space in South Africa) allows for an opportunity to give voice to personal, idiosyncratic embodied experiences, whether real or fictional. As Rita Felski in *Uses of Literature* argues, "our engagements with text are extraordinarily varied, complex, and often unpredictable in kind" (Felski 8). What this means is that texts allow room for the reader to be moved, to be shocked, enraged and whatever else they may be provoked to feel by the text. Through this, literary texts give the reader access to a world that is in one sense familiar but in quite another sense unfamiliar. This allows the reader to relate or recognise but also to be shocked by what feels far removed or foreign. Through interesting plots, character development, and other narrative devices, the texts analysed here provide room for challenging readers' ideas of what life in the township might entail.

As more years have gone by since the end of apartheid, writers have begun to treat apartheid as a ghostly presence or shadow that looms but no longer shapes every detail of South African writing. Megan Jones, in her article "Township Textualities" considers, "the way in which the township has been historically engaged across literature and criticism" (Jones, "Township Textualities" 26). Jones then tracks the trends of engagement with the township space that date back to the early days of the apartheid era (Jones, "Township Textualities" 33). What becomes clear from her work is that there is a typical way in which literature has engaged with township. This engagement has often been with the materiality of the township; essentially the unjust socio-economic conditions of the township. An engagement on these terms alone is rather limiting (for any space). Jones suggests that there is more, especially in the post-apartheid era, to be said about the literary representations of the township and proposes "domains of representation speaking to the experiences of township constituents" (Jones, "Township Textualities" 37). In her theorising of these domains, she creates a non-exhaustive list of categories under which to codify these representations:

> Emergent languages of blackness; patterns of consumption and destruction; threatening and threatened youth; dystopias; the predominance of 'the real'; and modes of satire as thriving sites of contestation. (Jones, "Township Textualities" 37)

These categories of representation are helpful for the purposes of this thesis in two ways. Firstly, they provide useful terms to describe various literary representations of the township in the post-apartheid era; and secondly because they are non-exhaustive, they are not limiting and allow for attention to idiosyncratic descriptions and surprising insights.

As already indicated, my discussion will focus on post-apartheid trends. In post-apartheid literature, particularly after 1994 and into the mid-2000s, the kinds of text that are produced might be described as dystopian hybrids of consumption and destruction. These texts display the troubles of being young, black and from the township in the first 10 years of South Africa's democracy. They deal with the fragility of South Africa's newfound freedom and how this 'freedom' does not seem to reach all in the same way, especially as political freedom does not translate into economic transformation. Such texts include Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995), which follows a protagonist Toloki, who day in and day out attends funerals in the township. In this text, Mda paints the township as a site of on-going death. Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* was published ten years after Mda's and the hope of attaining economic freedom has grown dimmer. The narrative is set in 1994 at the time of the immense potential of a new beginning in South Africa, however from the beginning Mhlongo sets up the satirical text to dash this hope. The text follows a protagonist who is young, black and from a township, and the reader watches as this protagonist's hopes are dashed time and again. The township is represented in this text largely in material terms and it is flagged largely as a sight of deprivation. Mhlongo follows on this trend by Mda of painting the township as a site of death. Though Mhlongo's text is perhaps not as overt in its depiction of death, there are undertones of it throughout. Another text by Mhlongo, published two years later, *After Tears* (2006), follows a similar trajectory, but changes focus ever so slightly in that it points more directly to patterns of consumption[1] and destruction as Bafana, yet another young black man from the township, grapples with life in the new South Africa. Bafana grabs hold of new opportunities found in the new South Africa by going to university to pursue his degree in law. When he fails, he soon finds that failure for someone like him is not an option.

[1] (Jones, "Township Textualities", 37)

In an attempt to relay his failure to his family, he finds that he cannot follow through with relaying the news given how his entire family's hopes seem to be staked in his success. This leaves Bafana with no choice but to pretend that he is the successful lawyer his family had hoped for until he is finally exposed. This text, like Mhlongo's earlier novel, draws out the pressures that are on young black people from the township to succeed, even when they lack the resources to do so. These protagonists carry the sentiment of disappointment which embodied this moment in South Africa's history[2]. Ultimately these early post-apartheid texts reflect

> the ambiguous trajectory of a nation caught up in a complex transformation. With the country's transformation to the "New" South Africa, new contradictions have emerged. The post-apartheid nation finds itself enmeshed in new forms of conflict, revealing an uneasy disjuncture marked by "transformation-as-entanglement" with racial and class-based contradictions that set forth an array of other socio-economic and cultural problems. (Nuttall 740)

These new contradictions that emerged required a fresh approach as the texts were concerned with the lingering legacies of apartheid, but also with the new challenges posed by a changing South Africa. Nuttall uses the term entanglement to describe the "[i]ntricate overlaps that mark the present and, at times, and in important ways, the past, as well" (Nuttall, Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid, iv). Entanglement as defined by Nuttall engages with the ways in which these overlaps interact with one another in post-apartheid South African literature. One critically acclaimed text which gives a view into this entanglement is Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* (2009). In this text Dlamini, in light of service delivery protests in the township of Katlehong in 2009, among other things asks the question of "what it might mean to remember (black) life lived under apartheid with fondness and longing" (Dlamini 13). This timely text painted a picture of the intricacies of life under apartheid from the vantage point of a time in South Africa's history which was equally complex. South Africa found itself over 10 years into its democracy and yet the lives of many had not been improved in the ways which the government promised they would. Another text which is representative of this era of South African writing is Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood*

[2] Bridget Grogan comments on this period of disappointment and disillusionment in her paper, "The excremental postapartheid imaginary: Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*".

(2010). It is a text which moves away from the dystopian style of Mda and Mhlongo and also deviates from Dlamini's nostalgic sentiment to explore radical indulgence and a kind of reckless living of township youth. This is also seen in Masande Ntshanga's *The Reactive* (2014). *The Reactive* is set in 2004 and follows the journey of a young man, Nathi, who infects himself with HIV Aids because of the guilt he feels over his younger brother's death. Nathi continues this path of self-destruction through drug use and careless sexual encounters with prostitutes. This is the life that Nathi lives while he is in Cape Town but also when he reaches Du Noon, the township. However, Du Noon becomes a site where he eventually finds some stability and a sense of healing. This shift in the representation of the township marks a remarkable turn in post-apartheid literary representations of the township space.

This thesis is interested in the shifting representations of the township space across the three post-apartheid narratives I have chosen. Chapter two explores Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*. It is a text that continually points to the costliness of freedom for those in the township, postulating that this freedom, promised by the new South Africa, is not accessible to those in the township due to systemic economic deprivation. The argument made in this first chapter is that Mhlongo represents the township as a space without agency for the characters who live there. However, as it has already been mentioned, this view of the township in merely material terms does not get at the complexity of the space and narratives that are produced some years after *Dog Eat Dog* are better suited to reflect this. *The Yearning* (2016) by Mohale Mashigo portrays the multifaceted and contradictory dynamism of the township space. In this text, which I discuss in chapter three, the township is initially presented as a background setting, in the sense that the author does not go out of her way to describe it. It is treated as kind of ghost or spectre which comes to haunt the narrative every now and then. I argue in this chapter that Mashigo, through the way that she sets out these ordinary events in the life of a family who happen to be from a township, moves away from the trend representing the township in material terms or in terms of the larger politics of the day. In its "rediscovery of the ordinary," the text offers a representation of the township as a space that is complex (Ndebele, *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 5). The nuances of the township space are uncovered (to some degree) through homing in on the struggles of the protagonist, Marubini and her family. This text offers a view into the crevices of a single family from Soweto and leads us, through its display of a family healing together, to the last representation of the township space discussed in this thesis: the township as a relational space. The relational nature of the township is an underlying theme that is

represented in literary texts as well as studies on the township. To say that the township space is a relational space is not to say that all the relationships that exist in the space are wholesome. Tlhabi's *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing* showcases this more nuanced contemporary view of the township, primarily through showing what becomes of someone who does not have supportive and nurturing relationships. I argue that through her text, Tlhabi draws attention to the weightiness of relationships and their potential for harm as well as their potential for good. Tlhabi showcases this especially through the life of one of the prominent figures in her text, Mabegzo. Tlhabi's memoir, the only work of non-fiction of the three texts under discussion, offers a view into real lives unfolding in the township of Orlando East. These diverse texts alongside each other offer particular angles on the representations of the township space in post-apartheid South Africa. The aim of this thesis is to provide an analysis of each of these to show the socio-political, intergenerational and interpersonal significance of the township in the lives of the protagonists.

Chapter 2: The Place of Agency in Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*

Introduction

The Cambridge Dictionary defines 'dog-eat-dog' as "a situation in which people will do anything to be successful, even if what they do harms other people" ("Dog-eat-dog" Cambridge Dictionary). To describe an environment as such suggests that the environment is a competitive one and we see this reflected in the description of the township space in Niq Mhlongo's novel *Dog Eat Dog*. *Dog Eat Dog* is the first novel by the South African writer, published in 2004. Mhlongo has since written four other novels and several short stories. In an interview about one of his more recent books, *Soweto: Under the Apricot Tree*, Mhlongo mentions how most of his stories are born out of real-life experiences (Malec, "Niq Mhlongo chats to Jennifer Malec about Soweto Under the Apricot Tree"). It is not surprising then to discover that in *Dog Eat Dog*, we find some similarities between Dingamanzi Njomane (the narrator and protagonist) and Mhlongo. Dingamanzi Njomane (known in the text as Dingz) like Mhlongo, comes from a township in Soweto[3]. In the text Dingz is studying at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) and this too is where Mhlongo studied. The time during which Mhlongo studied at Wits also correlates with the time that Dingz is studying at Wits in the text (Malec, "Niq Mhlongo chats to Jennifer Malec about Soweto Under the Apricot Tree"). These parallels between author and protagonist make the text even more intriguing. Mhlongo is deeply embedded in the text by virtue of these similarities but is also distant from it in that he does not merely write an autobiography or claim the narrative to be one about his own life. Instead Mhlongo leverages the imaginative possibilities of fiction to create a world that we can in part envision to be real but also a world which seems too painful to imagine. A world in which survival for one comes at the expense of another is a rather tragic one to imagine. Mhlongo, through elements such as setting and characterization leads us into such a world. The narrative is set in 1994 in South Africa, a significant moment in South Africa's history, at the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new and democratic era. The narrative follows Dingz as he navigates his first year at university. Dingz is a young black man from

[3] Soweto is a township located southwest of Johannesburg and was established in 1930 by the then government of South Africa. This township was established to separate black people from white people (who lived and resided in the city). Soweto was built close enough to Johannesburg for the residents to supply a workforce for the mines and domestic work in the city. As Soweto grew, within it, smaller townships also began to emerge. During apartheid it became a site of resistance against the apartheid government as many protests took place in this township – it remained this site of resistance up until then end of the apartheid regime in 1994. Today it is still the home of many and with its rich history, it has also become a national site of tourism in South Africa ("Soweto, Johannesburg" South African History Online).

Soweto, more specifically from Orlando West in Soweto. In some ways, he is living the dream of social upliftment through tertiary education that many young black men who lived during the apartheid years would never see realized. This dream, however, is not nearly as straightforwardly fulfilling as it seems, for it is riddled with challenges and obstacles that he must overcome. In some ways, the narrative can be seen as a contemporary riff on the picaresque: where a distinctly unheroic, dishonest protagonist stumbles from adventure to adventure (Luebering, "Picaresque Novel" n.pag).

The first of these challenges arises when Dingz faces the possibility of financial exclusion from Wits. He overcomes the hurdle, causing a great scene, only to be faced with many more. The climax of Dingz's struggles arrives when he needs to go to great lengths to get a fake death certificate in order to support his made-up reasons for having missed a test. In the end, Dingz organizes this death certificate and continues with his studies but even so, there is no promise of a happily ever after. The text ends with Dingz and his friends leaving a bar after having some rather circular arguments that leave the reader with more questions than answers. The end, like much of Dingz's life, is riddled with uncertainty about whether anyone can win in this dog-eat-dog world of the township. The precariousness of Dingz's life is central to the text, and if the phrase dog-eat-dog speaks to surviving at whatever cost, Dingz is its embodiment. Judith Butler, who writes extensively on precarity, states that in some sense all life is precarious. Butler, in view of the events of 9/11, states that America was always vulnerable but that its vulnerability was exposed through this moment in its history. In commenting on such vulnerability, Butler says, "[The fact] that we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another, are all reasons for both fear and grief" (Butler, "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation" XII). The fact that we are open to injury or death points to a kind of uncertainty about life. It also points to the ways in which we rely heavily on other members of society to not injure us. This reliance that exists within a society, Butler suggests, makes life precarious (uncertain) in that we live in the hope that those around us (although they very well could) will not injure us. Butler calls this particular vulnerability *primary vulnerability*, a position that "[o]ne cannot will away without ceasing to be human" (Butler, "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation" XIV). Human existence seen through this lens is then by nature precarious. Whilst Butler does take precariousness further in her essay by mentioning the varying degrees of precarity, in the sense that some categories of people are much more likely to face injury, be it through structural or direct violence, she does so with the purpose of

strengthening a recognition of the vulnerability of all people. For the purposes of this chapter, I look to her use of the word 'precarious' in so far as it speaks to the idea of an uncertain existence, as this is what we see typified in the life of Dingz in *Dog Eat Dog*. We are given a view into this precarity through moments in the text when Dingz and his friends are in the township or when he is describing what life is like in his township. One such example is when he is faced with the possibility of financial exclusion from the university, and he ponders the privacy and space that he has at his university residence versus the lack of it back home in the township: "At home I still slept in the dining-sitting room although I was twenty years old. Yes, at home I was woken up at four o'clock in the morning by the footsteps of my two brothers on their way to the kitchen to boil water before they went to work" (Mhlongo 9).

At his university residence (called the Y), although he has a roommate, he has a sense of privacy and space that is his own. Praising the Y he says, "I no longer walked the streets of the township to find funerals at which to get my weekend lunches" (Mhlongo 9). More than space that is his own, he is also well catered for and does not have to think of ways to get food. He also mentions how he has various meal options at the university which he does not have at home: "At the Y I could differentiate between my meals. I didn't have to queue in our local shop to buy those oily, constipating fatcakes every morning. I was fed with cornflakes, bacon and eggs, and Jungle Oats" (Mhlongo 9). Although Dingz conveys this shortage of food and lack of choice in a rather comical way, it is another layer of stress that he faces in the township. The stress contributes to the uncertainty or precariousness of township life. As the narrative develops, we soon find that overcrowded spaces, lack of privacy and food shortages are not unique to Dingz. These are conditions shared by some of Dingz's other friends who come from the township. Theks (one of Dingz's childhood friends) is faced with similar challenges:

> Theks was the fifth of her mother's children. All of her siblings were still living at their parent's house except for her oldest sister, who was living in sin with her lover in another neighbourhood. Her two brothers were both unemployed. The eldest lived with his 'vat en sit' lover and two children in one of their back rooms. (Mhlongo 65)

The issue of overcrowded spaces and unemployment is highlighted in this description of Theks's home environment. Her two brothers are unemployed and as we later find in the text it is expected that Theks will (through her studies) change these conditions for her entire

family. This expectation places an additional pressure on her and other characters from the township to succeed at university in that it is not just their own individual destinies at are at stake but rather it is the destinies of their families as well. In an already pressure-filled existence, these additional expectations can either motivate toward success or they can destroy the one who is obliged to meet them. Babes (another character from the township) grapples with this reality when she says:

> Ja, you know the expectations our families have when we are still studying. Our unemployed siblings and retrenched parents expect us to graduate and make big changes to our appalling family conditions. And if we fail to fulfil expectations, the frustration will pile up in our hearts and the weaker of us will become drunkards or even resort to crime,' reasoned Babes. (Mhlongo 128)

Babes addresses these expectations as though they are common knowledge and the reason for this is that for students from the township, they are. In further grappling with this reality, Babes mentions how crippling the pressure often is and what it can drive people to do. These pressures that Babes mentions are shared pressures that those coming from the township experience and while its extent may vary depending on the individual, it is nonetheless experienced. We see the effects of these pressures most clearly in Dingz, the protagonist. Dingz's pressure-filled and precarious existence leads him to live in a constant mode of stress geared towards survival, where he must survive at whatever cost – a dog-eat-dog state. This state that Dingz exists in rarely allows for reflection on the past or thoughts about the future because all that his precarity allows for is an overwhelming need to secure the present. His present challenges often demand his attention to such an extent that he does not have time to see how the events of his life might relate to one another and so he lives moment-by-moment, like a picaro. The reader soon sees how this state of affairs is to Dingz's detriment, but he himself cannot see it due to the way in which his precarity confines him to thinking only about his immediate next steps.

It is then in view of such precarity that the central question of this chapter – agency – is raised. According to Margaret Archer, agency is found when an agent can deliberate about which course of action will yield the greatest result (Archer 6). Here Archer defines agency as more than just the ability to make a choice or decision – she takes it further and states that for agency to exist, the agent should deliberate about which choice or decision will yield the

greatest result. Archer's definition affects how we view the different degrees of agency available to characters in *Dog Eat Dog*. Our analysis of these characters changes because although in the text we find that the characters do have the freedom to decide on a particular course of action, they do not necessarily have the freedom to choose the course of action that will yield the greatest result. It is in view of this that I argue that Dingz and many of the people from the township do not have agency. If there is any glimpse of agency, I argue that in the grander scheme of their precarious lives, these moments of agency are inconsequential and do not bring about any sustainable change in their lives.

I argue that Mhlongo makes his characters' lack of agency abundantly clear through his use of setting and characterization. Regarding setting, Mhlongo makes use of it in two main ways: firstly, he uses it in order to show how a place shapes a person. We see this most clearly in Dingz, who has grown up in the township. We see the constraints that come with this especially when he finds himself in another environment (university) and he struggles to adapt. I argue that Mhlongo attributes this inability to adapt not to a lack of trying on the part of Dingz but rather to the way in which the place that Dingz is from has shaped him. Dingz navigates this environment that offers him more freedoms and opportunities without much success, because he struggles to adapt his behaviour. Furthermore, to amplify this notion of Dingz's lack of agency, Mhlongo sets up a space that drastically contrasts the township. This space being Wits University. He uses the university to highlight the extent of the lack in the township that Dingz hails from- Orlando West. He depicts Wits University as a space that offers freedom and opportunities whilst his home in the township is associated with constraints and uncertainties. A glimpse of this is seen when Dingz says:

> That month that I had been allowed to stay at the Y I had tasted the cheese life. I had my own room, and although I was sharing it with my newly acquired friend Dworkin at least I enjoyed some privacy, unlike at home in our four-roomed Soweto house. (Mhlongo 9)

Given the disparity between the university environment and the township, it becomes clear why Dingz prefers his residence rather than his home. Although Dingz finds himself in this new environment, in this new land of opportunity, precarity is still what drives him. The constant need to survive or take hold of what is available in the present blinds Dingz from considering various future possibilities, which would yield better decisions. The constant

pressures that Dingz lives under render him (in many ways) unable to make choices that will yield the better result. We also find this to be the case for many of the characters that come from the township but as the protagonist, Dingz remains the central focus of my analysis.

This use of setting to highlight Dingz's and other characters' lack of agency is complemented by Mhlongo's characterization, which serves a similar function. I argue that Mhlongo again here through his characterization stresses Dingz's lack of agency. One of the more apparent ways we see this is through Dingz's lack of character development from the start to the end of the text. Minesh Dass comments on this lack of character development that: "He [Dingz] cannot change and cannot avoid the challenges put before him. In such a story, basic though its central feature might be, there is clearly a sense in which change is not possible" (Dass 128). We see this in moments where Dingz is given the opportunity to make a better choice but does not. He does not turn out to be the commonly expected protagonist who struggles, learns his lesson, and lives happily ever after. This pattern of bad choices by Dingz can be attributed to one of two things: either Dingz is committed to self-sabotage, or he lacks agency. In seeing Dingz fighting to remain in university (especially when he stands to be expelled) we see that self-sabotage is not what Dingz is aiming at and for this reason I argue that the only reason why he would fail to make choices that yield the greatest result is because he is not able to. Dingz lacks agency and we see this through him as a character and through the lives of some of his township friends. Dingz and his friends have the misfortune of existing in a society that can only be described as dog-eat-dog, where one either eats or is eaten (metaphorically speaking). The priority then in such a life is survival at whatever cost. This mentality, I argue, leads to destructive ways of living. If the only certainty that an individual is offered is the present moment this results in desperate attempts at self-preservation (which we see in the text) and unrestrained enjoyment, which we also see in the text: "The overwhelming pressure of the environment in which we live makes people pursue their own pleasure at whatever cost" (Mhlongo 100). Dingz makes this observation himself in viewing the way people pursue pleasure at parties in the township. This pursuit of pleasure is also something that Dingz succumbs to. This again displays a lack of agency, in that despite his insight, he still does not make better choices. The lack of agency is also further stressed through other characters in the text who come from more affluent backgrounds. These characters from affluent backgrounds provide a contrast to Dingz, highlighting his lack of agency and suggesting how this agency is something that is available to some but not to him and many of his township friends.

The overall argument made in this chapter then is that Dingz and many of his friends from the township lack agency due to the precarious conditions of the township that have shaped their lives. I argue that Mhlongo uses setting and characterization in order to highlight this precarity that results in a lack of agency. In some sense, Mhlongo even goes as far as to suggest that the characters who come from such a precarious background cannot be held liable or at least cannot be expected to make better choices, because of the place they come from and how it has conditioned them to function in a particular way. Mhlongo of course does this in a nuanced way in that he does not merely state it simplistically but rather includes certain ambiguities that point to the complexity of the matter of place shaping people. This nuance is made possible by the fact that his text is a work of fiction. However even in retaining ambiguities I argue that Mhlongo still highlights the lack of agency experienced by these characters, and the fact that perhaps before questions of liability can be raised, the matter of agency is what needs to be addressed first. As we follow this young man's precarious life, we see the way in which freedom is not free for all. Dingz's lack of agency stresses this point, and it is the focus of my argument in this chapter.

The Role of Setting in Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*

Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* picks up on the excitement and uncertainty of 1994, South Africa. With the birth of the new democratic South Africa, there was great excitement for all that South Africa could become but also uncertainty as to whether it could become all that was expected of it. The greatest excitement however was that of freedom and the great change that this freedom would bring for all lives. This expectation is one that is echoed in Mhlongo's text quite often but is most evident when Dingz and his friends join with the rest of South Africa in 1994 during the nation's first democratic elections:

> A winding fifty-metre queue stretched out from Braamfontein Civic Centre. We had been standing there for about two hours. The opportunity to vote had attracted many people; I saw a crowd of men and women the like of which I had never seen before. It was a queue of limitless hope. Many of us there thought this election would reshape our lives in the southern part of this unruly 'Dark Continent'. (Mhlongo 58)

The importance of these elections to people is highlighted here when Dingz describes the queue as a queue of limitless hope. It cannot be stressed enough perhaps how paramount this

election was for people. As Dingz mentions, he and many others thought that the election would reshape their lives. As the narrative progresses however, it becomes evident that these hopes would be dashed. I argue that Mhlongo sets up this scene rather purposefully in order to further deepen the disappointments that Dingz faces throughout the text. As the text progresses, we see how the election does not in fact reshape Dingz's life nor does it reshape the lives of those who find themselves in a similarly precarious position.

Dingz's precarity stems from growing up in Orlando West in Soweto. Dingz, although he finds himself studying at the University of the Witwatersrand, struggles to escape the way in which his home environment has shaped him. Tim Cresswell in his book *Place: A Short Introduction,* presents various ideas about what place is but in essence he defines place as space upon which people impose meaning, transforming random space into a meaningful place (Cresswell 7). This "place" is shaped by natural geographic factors but also by the people that live in that space; however, the place in which people live also has an influence on them (Cresswell 5). The influence that place has in shaping individuals is a central part of Mhlongo's message and we see it in his chosen settings for the text. The main spaces where Mhlongo situates his characters are the University of the Witwatersrand and Soweto. I argue that Mhlongo contrasts these two spaces in order to further emphasise the precarity of township life. In the text Mhlongo takes more care to describe the township, since it is the place that has shaped Dingz and his behaviour. Through the way the township is depicted, we come to see why Dingz's life can be described as precarious, and furthermore why it can be argued that as a result of his precarity, he does not have agency.

The first environment in which we encounter Dingz is at the YMCA (known as the Y), his university residence in Braamfontein[4]:

> I had just eaten my dinner at the YMCA in Braamfontein. The Y, as we affectionately called it, had offered me temporary accommodation for about a month now, while I tried to sort out my disagreement with the University Bursary Committee… Now the thought of being forced to part with the cheese life of the Y because of this letter from

[4] Braamfontein is a residential suburb that borders Johannesburg's city centre. This residential suburb started off as a Farm in 1853 and has developed alongside Johannesburg. After the establishment of Wits University in 1920, this area soon became a business hub that includes residential flats which provide accommodation for students at the university. ("Braamfontein, A suburb of Johannesburg" South African History Online)

> the Bursary Committee was like a curse. It was as cruel as a man who chops off the breasts of the mother as the hungry baby tries to suck the fresh milk from them. (Mhlongo 8)

This affection that Dingz seems to have for the Y is not connected to sentimentality but rather to the kind of life that this place offers: a life which is more luxurious than he is used to, hence the "cheese life". However, when he equates the cruelty of being removed from this life to, "a man who chops off the breasts of a mother as the hungry baby tries to suck fresh milk from them," he is suggesting that staying there is necessary for his very basic survival. The fact that his stay at the Y is temporary is rather unsettling and points early on to Dingz's precarious existence.

We see further into this precarious life when Dingz describes his home environment. He is alarmed here when he finds that although he supplied all the necessary paperwork to obtain a bursary, they turn him down:

> I thought I had supplied everything that the Bursary Committee needed: copies of my father's death certificate and my mother's pension slip, an affidavit sworn at our local police station giving the names and ages of the nine other family members who depended on my mother's pension, as well as three other affidavits confirming all movable and immovable property that we owned. Although, unfortunately, my family did not own any immovable property as the house in Soweto that we had been living in since 1963 was leased to us by the apartheid government for a period of 99 years. (Mhlongo 8)

From this information we find that Dingz's father passed away and that his mother (on her pensioner's slip) is the primary caregiver responsible for nine family members. These conditions that he describes offer insight into why he values the life that he has at the Y. We come to see that without financial help, Dingz cannot study. The facts of his family background very clearly explain how he is unable to study without a bursary; yet the expectation is that he must go to even greater lengths to stress his poverty. He cannot simply apply with the facts and receive an offer, rather he is forced to perform his poverty. Dass, in commenting on this matter paints a picture of the predicament in which this places Dingz and many others who face the exclusion that he does: "[h]e must somehow prove he is poorer

than other applicants, playing a zero-sum game in which working-class black students are effectively pitted against one another for available resources (hence the name of the novel)" (Dass 128). Dingz and other working-class black students are in a catch-22 situation. They cannot come out as victors – all they can hope to do in such a system is to not lose, and that is precisely what Dingz attempts to do. The conditions of the system they live in do not allow them to do any more than this, which becomes more and more evident in the text as we see more of what township life is like for Dingz and many of his friends.

Through what Dingz shares, we are introduced to Dingz's financial needs, and we are given an idea of his precarious living conditions. Dingz mentions the fact that his family does not own immovable property. This idea that even his family home does not truly belong to them points to the uncertainty of their lives during apartheid and the uncertainty of their lives after apartheid. In this new democratic South Africa where all are free, Dingz and his family still find themselves at the mercy of the government in a way that causes great uncertainty. They can never quite feel settled and this is reflected in the way we see Dingz navigating his life throughout the text. Dingz is never afforded a moment of comfort. The larger socio-economic and political systems that act upon Dingz's life constantly uproot him and because of this he must constantly fight to keep his place, whether it is at the university or in the township.

The unsettling nature of the township space is further emphasised in the text when Dingz and his friend Theks are on a taxi home (to Soweto). They see several new townships and begin to comment on them:

> Theks started smiling; she was looking at the squatter camp by the side of the road. I smiled back at her. 'What name will be given to this affirmative settlement?' she asked curiously. 'Well. Let me see,' I said mulling it over, 'there are lots of Mandela Views already. Maybe Mbekiville?' 'Whaa! I don't think so because we already have one next to Fourways,' said Theks… People use the names of famous political leaders to attract the government's attention to the urgent need for housing. It is also a clever tactic to delay any possible eviction that might follow. (Mhlongo 81-82)

There are several alarming aspects that come to light in this conversation. First is the reference to an 'affirmative settlement.' Affirmative Action[5] in South Africa was implemented in order to address the injustices of the past where whites were given preference in the workplace and in various other spaces. The goal of Affirmative Action then was to correct this by ensuring that people from previously disadvantaged groups have equal opportunities in the workplace ("What is Affirmative Action" Investopedia). In referring to a squatter camp as an "affirmative settlement," Theks and Dingz are pointing to the policy's failure to help the most marginalized in South African society, the poor. In the bid to ensure that the poor are not forgotten by the government, they name their settlements after famous political leaders at the time. Dingz also mentions how this is a tactic that helps them avoid eviction, further describing their very precarious position in South African society. Dingz is in the same position which is why he too must fight to not be forcibly removed from his position in society. The other alarming aspect of this scene is that, from what Dingz and Theks observe, there seems to be an increase in the amount of these settlements, hence the need to come up with a new name for the squatter camp that they see. The third concern is how in this promising democracy the passage indicates a foundation of distrust. The people who build these affirmative settlements do not trust the government to build houses for them, so they build their own for the sake of shelter but also to remind the government about the issue of housing. These settlements thus point to a central issue which the text points to in various ways, namely the failure of government and other institutional structures to help those who were disadvantaged by past structures.

Mhlongo rightly holds these structures accountable for what they promised to people. In the case of Dingz in particular, Mhlongo points to the ways in which these institutional structures promised him a better future, exposing their hypocrisy when they then deny him access to that future. The freedom promised to all South Africans and the commitment to address the injustices of the past does not seem to hold true for Dingz and many others who find themselves on the fringes of South African society. These precarious individuals find themselves either pushed further and further toward the periphery of South African society, or they fight in order to keep their place. This is what Dingz intends to do by whatever means: "He must not be passive; rather he must rage and force his will upon a world which

[5] Refers to the policies that take factors including, "race, religion, sex or national origin" into account in order to benefit an underrepresented group, usually as means to counter the effects of a history of discrimination ("What is Affirmative Action" Investopedia).

provides him with little in the way of opportunities" (Dass 128). And this is what we see Dingz do when he fights for the bursary that he needs to study:

> I got an exemption two years ago and I have been sitting at home since then waiting for the opportunity to study at this institution. I applied to the Faculty of Arts and got admitted to do my BA. It's my wish that this office grant me a bursary so that I can study, graduate, get a better job and assist my poverty-stricken family. My father has passed away and my mother is a pensioner and single-handedly supports nine members of our family. There's nowhere I can go for help except this office. (Mhlongo 20)

Dingz, in a rather frank manner here, articulates the desperate situation he is in. He makes it clear that this bursary is something of a life jacket for him and his family. He reiterates in a way what a cruel act it would be to deny him assistance. He almost seems to be suggesting that the institution, knowing his financial background, should not accept him if it will not provide the means for him to study there. To do this is to dangle a carrot in front of a donkey. All these promises and opportunities that are available to him are dangled before him but are kept continually out of his reach. What also seems to be drawn out in this instance is that Dingz is not in his precarious position because he does not try – he does try – but his attempts can only take him so far. The life that has been made available to him because of the injustices of the past affords him very limited options. The limitations of the township are further seen when Dingz ponders the prospect of being forced to move back to the township:

> I felt like I was being pushed back into a gorge filled with hungry crocodiles. There was nothing exciting for me about living the life of the unemployed and unemployable, whose days in the township fold without hope… I was completely bored of watching the predictable soapies on my brother's television set just to kill the slow-moving time. I was tired of my uneventful township life as a whole. (Mhlongo 9)

Dingz's description of township life does not offer much in the way of stimulation. What he describes is a life of boredom, directionless and without hope. In this Dingz also points to the negative influence on personal well-being that life in the township can have on an individual. The hopelessness of the environment might lead people to despair. With such low prospects for a better life in the township environment, Dingz clings desperately to the newly found environment of the university, which offers him at the very least an opportunity of escape.

His description of the township environment, emphasising the idea that there is very little to look forward to, may explain another culture that exists within the township: the 'partying culture', where people go to great lengths to secure the enjoyment that may be found at a party:

> Those of us who live there know that day in and day out people gad around trying to locate parties… Even if there is no money to spend on a party there are lots of fly-by-night loan sharks called mashonisa. They lend money and hold the borrower's bankcard as a sort of security. When the borrower gets paid the mashonisa reimburse themselves plus whatever other money is owed to pay off the high interest rate. (Mhlongo 100)

This way of life would seem to be at odds with a precarious existence as one might expect cautious and shrewd behaviour but according to Dingz this is not the case. He mentions here how a common practice in the township was locating parties. This suggests an active search for these gatherings. Furthermore, people would not only locate these parties, but they also take out loans in order to be able to enjoy the festivities. Megan Jones helps in providing clarity on why such a practice might gain popularity when she discusses another cultural phenomenon that occurs in the township, I'khothane:

> [O]riginally, a competition between dance crews, I'khothane has acquired an edgier intention; whereas incarnations of youth culture affirm self through forms of conspicuous consumption, I'khothane has evolved into what we might call conspicuous destruction. As crowds of young people gather round participants in Primville, Soweto, designer clothes and shoes worth thousands of rands are set alight in a display that asserts wealth through indifference to the commodity. (Jones, "Conspicuous Destruction, Aspiration and Motion in the South African Township" 209)

She mentions how: "[t]he outraged responses to i'khothane point to a widespread misreading of why such practices attain currency among township youth" (Jones, "Conspicuous Destruction, Aspiration and Motion in the South African Township" 210). Instead of outrage, Jones suggests that a more fruitful engagement with this phenomenon might be to question why such an obviously wasteful practice gains such traction. Similarly, in the case of these

desperately sought-after parties in Dingz's township, the question to be asked is why a practice, which is unaffordable for so many, is pursued to such a desperate extent? The reason given in the text as to why these parties as well as pleasure in general is pursued at whatever cost is due to the overwhelming pressures of the township environment (Mhlongo 100). In view of the earlier description of township life as uneventful and hopeless, what these parties seem to offer is a break from the monotony and hopelessness that people feel. This pursuit of pleasure can be considered a kind of coping mechanism for people. These parties offer them something to look forward to.

The overwhelming pressure that drives people to pursue pleasure at whatever cost is also seen in Dingz. The moment where we see this in the text is when he brings a girl back to his room at the Y, knowing that it could get him into trouble: "No female visitor was ever allowed beyond the reception area. That was our number-one rule and it was non-negotiable" (Mhlongo 108). Prior to this instance, where Dingz is caught taking a girl up to his room, he and his roommate Dworkin already had a standing agreement that if either one of them brought a girl to the room, the other had to give them privacy (Mhlongo 105). This agreement indicates to us that the no-girl rule at the Y was one that Dingz and Dworkin regularly broke. Even when Dingz is confronted by the caretaker, who warns him of the consequences of getting caught, Dingz still pursues this moment of pleasure. The caretaker even pleads with Dingz as his job may be on the line because he witnesses Dingz taking Nkanyezi up to his room:

> 'But you know I'm on duty and if I let you go up with her I'll lose my job.'
> 'I promise it will be a quick thing; she won't stay for long, man.'
> The caretaker slowly shook his head. 'You're trouble, you know that?'
> 'You know,' I said, shrugging my shoulders. (Mhlongo 109)

Firstly, what seems short-sighted in taking this huge risk is that Nkanyezi is not even his girlfriend, but a girl he met at a party in the township the weekend prior. His decision is not an expression of earnest commitment: he risks being disciplined for a moment of pleasure. Secondly, Dingz knowingly transgresses this number-one rule at the Y, which he knows to be non-negotiable, merely for some passionate moments. Lastly and most importantly, Dingz is even willing to place the caretaker's job at risk for his own pleasure. It seems that Dingz cannot see beyond his own instant gratification. In this moment with Nkanyezi his risky

behaviour goes even further when he (because of the pleasure of the moment) decides not to use a condom. It is only after they have had intercourse that he regains his senses: "That sight of condoms brought me back to my senses again. Quietly, I started blaming myself for putting myself under unnecessary stress" (Mhlongo 112). This moment of reflection is fleeting because it is not long before Dingz is enveloped by the passion of the moment once again. His reflection on the risk he just took in not using a condom does not last long enough to change his ongoing pursuit of pleasure. Similarly, to taking out a loan for parties, it seems not only strange but foolish of Dingz to risk his 'cheese life' at the Y for a moment of pleasure that could have taken place anywhere else. It seems counter-intuitive of Dingz to shun this opportunity to stay at the Y and furthermore to waste the opportunity to be in an environment that offers him a greater sense of security than home. Either Dingz is a truly self-destructive individual or there is something beyond himself that grips him and drives him to make the decisions that he makes.

I argue here, then, that it is this 'something else' that grips Dingz that Mhlongo attempts to draw our attention to, namely the manner in which the conditions of the past continue to affect his present. The arrival of democracy does not do away with his township upbringing under apartheid which has shaped him. These experiences shape Dingz and Mhlongo displays them through various flashbacks. While drinking a beer that he purchases with some of his grocery shopping, Dingz thinks back to his family's life in Soweto under apartheid:

> At midnight every Tuesday and Friday the white policemen would knock rudely on our kitchen and sitting-dining-room doors. Without search warrants, they would rummage through our house for so-called illegal immigrants from the homelands and any other illegal stuff such as homemade ntakunyisa beer. (Mhlongo 40)

Here we see the very clear geographic exclusion of black lives through the way in which they could not freely move around in South Africa. With the passing of the Homelands Act[6] in 1970 black South Africans were often considered foreigners in their own land due to legislation like this. Black bodies suffered violence and we see this ensue in Dingz's

[6] The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 made every black South African, irrespective of actual residence, a citizen of one of the Bantustans, thereby excluding blacks from the South Africa body politic. ("Apartheid" Encyclopaedia Britannica)

flashback, the night that policemen discovered that Dingz's uncle had been living with them longer than his permit allowed:

> 'You are supposed to be ten in this house. Which baboon does not belong here?' asked one of the police officers angrily… 'Where are your papers?' asked another police officer. Before my uncle could respond, the police officer's fat hand was on the scruff of his neck. I was hoping they wouldn't beat him up; Brixton police were notorious for their violence. (Mhlongo 42)

Dingz recalls this memory where he and his family were dehumanized not only through name calling but through the physical violence that occurs when the police grab hold of Dingz's uncle. Dingz in this same scene mentions how after the police took his uncle away, his family never saw him for another ten years. The idea that there was no one who took note of this clear abuse of authority shows how little black lives mattered under apartheid. Something else that we see through Dingz's flashback is how the police force, which was meant to ensure that the law was upheld and that citizens were protected, did not do this. In fact, in their engagements with black lives, the police transgressed the law and harmed citizens. The fact that this police force that came into Dingz's home was notorious for their violence is quite disturbing. Their biweekly invasions gives an idea of how other nights might have played out in Dingz's childhood. This experience is grounded in the space that Dingz was from. Living in the township made his family and many others open to daily harassment and victimization by apartheid police. The reason that living in the township made individuals open to such violations of privacy goes back to the original design of the township which was to control and contain the movements of black South Africans.

The irony Mhlongo draws out at this moment is found in what happens to Dingz after he has the flashback. Moments later, a police vehicle stops in front of him and two police officers confront him about drinking in public. The one police officer is Indian and the other white. The white police officer bears a startling resemblance to the apartheid police who terrorized people in his township. In his flashback Dingz had described the white and greatly feared apartheid police as having, "[t]wo thirds of their faces covered by a bushy beard and moustache" (Mhlongo 43). The white officer who confronts him in the present is tall, white and has a moustache (Mhlongo 45). Furthermore, these two policemen (much like the apartheid police who invaded Dingz's home) have no desire to uphold the law or protect

citizens as they threaten Dingz with a prison sentence in order to get a bribe from him. When Dingz does not immediately co-operate, they too use violence, grabbing him in a similar way to how they grabbed his uncle: “The other officer grabbed me by the scruff of my neck…”, and then they also throw Dingz into the back of a police car (Mhlongo 47).

The flashback Dingz has about his uncle being taken away by the apartheid police and his experience with the police are two moments that mirror one another. The text does not give details of whether his uncle was beaten by the police or not but his rough arrest and the way they drag him to the police vehicle indicate that this would have been the case. When he attempts to get out of the situation by reporting the policemen for accepting a bribe from him, the police use force to get themselves out of the situation:

> I thought that they were going to negotiate a deal with me, but that was not the case. Suddenly Naicker’s big hand was around my balls and I was standing on my toes with pain. Viljoen grabbed the Walkman from my pocket. I tried to resist, but Viljoen’s fist struck me across my mouth. I tasted blood. Naicker let go of my balls and I staggered and fell down. I lay still on the pavement pretending I had lost consciousness, but Viljoen’s boot struck me in the ribs. A few minutes later I was handcuffed and bundled inside the car. (Mhlongo 50)

On both occasions, the victims of police violence have no way of fighting back and the violence is excessive. These two moments are almost identical and the only major thing that separates them are the time and place where they occur. Dingz’s uncle experiences this violence under apartheid, which for black lives in the township was not uncommon. Dingz experiences this violence in the new democratic South Africa, and perhaps what makes the matter worse for Dingz is that he experiences the trauma twice. First when he witnesses it happening to his uncle, and then when he himself experiences it. The corruption that existed during apartheid continues to exist after apartheid, and Dingz is well aware of it when he voices his suspicions of how: “[He] knew that the officers would try everything to incriminate [him] (Mhlongo 48).” He further says that “They are used to the system. They are also the ones who corrupt it. They know how it works and how to exploit it in their favour” (Mhlongo 48). This is exactly what we see play out, after the policemen have beat up Dingz and put him in their police vehicle. They go on to attend a crime scene and then drop him off

at his residence. No consequences follow their actions at all, and this occurs in the 'new' and 'free' South Africa.

Through placing these two moments next to each other, Mhlongo highlights how the past is not yet fully in the past. Dingz, who was marginalized and furthermore criminalized due to the colour of his skin remains in a precarious position even in post-apartheid South Africa. And in this instance and others throughout the text, Mhlongo, as Christopher Warnes suggests, enacts "a critique of a post-apartheid reality in which social relations are deformed by ongoing exploitation and in which the post-apartheid project – so full of the promises of justice, fairness and equality – shows the signs of grotesque betrayal" (Warnes 549). The other idea that Mhlongo highlights is how this past that is not fully past yet has impacted Dingz and continues to impact him. His marginalization as a black man from the township continues into the present. A declaration of freedom and some opportunities do not undo what the apartheid past has done to Dingz, or to the systems and structures in South Africa.

The failure of these systems and structures to deliver on promises made is further emphasised in the text in Dingz's education. Mhlongo once again offers context around Dingz's education in that we are told that he received Bantu education which he (Dingz) mocks by calling it the "Blacks are nothing to us syllabus" (Mhlongo 53). Dingz's remark is also telling in the sense that he is suggesting that the quality of the education conveyed this very message to those who were a part of it. One of the promises made regarding education is that "[they] had been promised access to a better education." Dingz himself also wanted to "[v]ote for whoever claimed to have fought tooth and nail to overthrow the apartheid government so that [he] now found [himself] admitted to a formerly white-only institution" (Mhlongo 61). Dingz feels morally obliged to vote for those who claimed to have brought about change. However, from the opening of the text when Dingz is struggling to get a bursary, there is an irony to be found in that already we are seeing an issue with the promises that were made.

The promises do not quite trickle to the margins of South African society. Dingz's setting (both past and present) has not set him up in the best position to experience the promises of liberation. Mhlongo paints this idea for us through the flashbacks to the past that Dingz has, and by alluding to how his past has impacted him and continues to shape him. Certain elements of the past have not changed and they continue to negatively impact Dingz. In a sense Mhlongo says via his novel what Jacob Dlamini says of post-apartheid South Africa:

"[t]he lives of South Africans after transition into democracy in 1994 did most certainly change - they just did not necessarily change in the ways in which people had hoped" (Dlamini, "Life Choices and South African Biography" 11). While Dingz benefits from certain experiences in the new South Africa (such as entrance to a formerly whites-only institution) there are still a great deal of other circumstances that have not changed. Mhlongo highlights this by showcasing the influence of the township environment on Dingz's life.

In all Dingz's struggles, Mhlongo frequently points back to the vulnerability and precarity of his life that are a result of the township, and of the township's foundations in unjust systems. The culmination of the precariousness of township life in the text arrives when Dingz and his friend from childhood, Dunga, stumble upon the death of three men in the township.

> Next to the victims were all sorts of weapons that had been used by the angry crowd of men, women and children. I saw pangas, spades, pick handles, axes and garden forks… 'By the way, this is the township,' Dunga said, as if to remind himself. 'Life is cheap and death is absolutely free of charge.' (Mhlongo 184)

Apart from the deeply disturbing nature of this bloody scene, the underlying disturbance comes from the way in which this violent scene comes as no surprise to Dunga and Dingz. Dunga even goes to the extent of saying that these dead men are an image of what the township is. This view of the township as a space in which life is not valued and death seems to be lurking around every corner paints the picture of a rather unliveable life. This is further illustrated in what follows, when Dunga, in seeking more context for the deaths, asks:

> 'What have they done?'… 'They are thieves,' she answered with one brief uninterested look at Dunga. 'But where were the police?' 'Don't tell me about those bastards – all they know is taking bribes and buying stolen goods themselves,' said the vigilante angrily. About ten police officers were busily taking an official statement from one of the senior citizens standing there. But it was obvious that by the time they arrived the three victims were already somewhere between heaven and hell, although the police station was just down the road. (Mhlongo 184)

Here more clarity is given as to why the community takes matters of justice into their own hands. From what the woman says to Dunga, the police have often proven unhelpful to the

community that they are supposed to protect. Instead, they are notorious for accepting bribes and perpetuating crime by buying stolen goods as well. There is in this woman's response the sense that if they do not take measures to protect their community, no one will and the late arrival of the police to the scene confirms her sentiment. This idea of those in the township being discarded and forgotten is not new in the text: taking justice into their own hands is reminiscent of the idea of the 'affirmative settlements' that people build. People do not choose options such as killing criminals as a first choice or building their own housing because it is the easiest way of doing things but rather because they are forced by conditions to do so. There is no choice left but these unconventional methods which they use to have their needs met when systems which are meant to meet these needs fail them.

It is in such an environment that Dingz grows up and is shaped. The township space is an environment where life is cheap, death is "free of charge" (Mhlongo 184), and violence common. It has provided very little in the way of financial stability, food security or everyday safety. The township, as Dingz experiences it, is a place where tomorrow is not guaranteed but rather hoped for. It is in painting Dingz's precarious conditions that Mhlongo points us to the idea that even though Dingz has not chosen to be there, he is largely shaped by this precarious environment. Through the use of setting, Mhlongo prevents any simplified interrogation of Dingz that merely points at his choices and does not consider his greater context. Mhlongo points this out as an oversimplification of his past and present circumstances. A lifetime of being shaped by the township positions Dingz in a particular way in terms of finances, in terms of the quality of his decisions and in terms of the freedoms that he has. Because of place (the township he is from) we come to see that Dingz is constrained in ways that even he cannot always see. In view of these constraints, I argue that he cannot be viewed as one who has agency. If we consider that agency is the ability to deliberate and take the course of action that will yield the greatest result, we find that Dingz is unable to do this, not because he chooses poorly but rather because of how the environment he comes from has shaped him.

The Role of Characterisation in Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*

Proceeding from the consideration that Dingz is shaped largely by his context, we turn to view who he is. What is interesting to note in the case of Dingz is that from the beginning to the end of the text, he remains the same. There is hardly any development in his character. At

the start of the text, we meet him as a foolhardy and deceitful young man, and by the end of the text he is no different. In one of our first encounters with him, we find him shouting at administration officers and lying in order to get a bursary, and at the end of the text we find him lying to get an exemption from an exam he missed. The first time we are introduced to Dingz's rather brazen attitude is when he goes to the University's Financial Aid Office to get financial assistance. On his way to the office, he mentions how he has already mapped out exactly what he is going to say, and from this we get a view into his foolhardy nature:

> I had already made up my mind about what I was going to say to the secretary. I was going to tell her that I wanted to have a word with Jane. Jane was the first name of Dr Winterburn, who wrote me those three insensitive letters. I did not even know where her office was. All I knew was that if you want to get past a stubborn secretary to have a word with their lazy boss, you need to use the boss's first name. (Mhlongo 11)

The fact that Dingz assumes this forceful approach to be the only kind that could give him access to Dr Winterburn points either to distorted perception on his part, or to something he may have experienced in the past. The very general way in which he speaks about how to get past a 'stubborn secretary' to their 'lazy boss', as he puts it, leads us to believe it is an approach that he has adapted from previous experience. Before he gets the opportunity to put it into practice, he is stopped in his tracks by the secretary of the office:

> As I expected, I was immediately subjected to a barrage of insults from a coloured secretary with a narrow forehead. She made sure that everyone inside the office could hear her. 'Shoo! You know I thought they lie. But they were right to say that if you want to hide money from a black person, you must put it in writing,' she said rubbing her temple with a yellow ballpoint pen… 'What do you want in the university if you cannot read?' She looked at me with disdain. 'Can't you see what is written there?'… Stand in the queue and wait for someone to help you. (Mhlongo 11-12)

From this response, we see that Dingz was not irrational in believing he had to prepare for encountering a stubborn secretary. Dingz does not even get to initiate his forceful approach because upon skipping the queue, the secretary attacks him immediately. She insults him, firstly in a very public way ensuring that everyone could hear and also by making a racist remark suggesting that black people cannot read. Dingz, understandably, explodes in

response to this treatment by the secretary and she calls her supervisor in fear. The supervisor however then further insults Dingz:

> 'Do not storm in here like you are entering a butchery or supermarket.' There was more laughter from everyone in the office. She paused and waited for the laughter to subside. 'Haa! Just look at him! Do you think you can just get a free education without standing in a line like the others?'… 'You must act like a civilised person and apologise to Rachel for your apish behaviour.' (Mhlongo 13)

Ms Steenkamp, the supervisor continues with the racist remarks, calling Dingz's behaviour "apish". At this stage, Dingz's behaviour has only been in response to the insults that he was met with upon entering the office. Ms Steenkamp, like the secretary Rachel, makes a point of making a spectacle of Dingz, especially when she calls on those in the room to look at him. Instead of conceding and just walking away Dingz continues to fight back:

> 'Do you want to regret having seen me in this office today?' I paused and looked at the two ladies as if I was waiting for an answer. They were bloody scared. I opened my eyes wide as if the two ladies had just insulted the president of the country. My aim was to frighten them into thinking that I was some big name. (Mhlongo 14)

This scene finally warrants the attention of Dr Winterburn:

> 'Let's not be emotional and…' said Dr Winterburn, looking at me. 'Who's emotional?' I snapped. 'I mean, it's natural to be emotional and I understand how you feel,' she said patronizingly. Her attitude made my blood boil. 'Listen here! Are you coming to take sides or have you taken them already? 'No no no. We don't take sides in this office,' she countered defensively. That's where I wanted her, on the defensive. (Mhlongo 15)

As I have mentioned, Dingz as a character is a foolhardy, brazen young man and in these two instances, Mhlongo highlights why Dingz is this way. It is clear that his brazen attitude has been shaped by his position in this world. Prior to engaging anyone at the Financial Aid Office Dingz knew that there would be these obstacles and that he had to have a strategy to be able to overcome them. This shows us that it is a world he is used to. As Dass claims, Dingz has to force himself upon a world that is hostile to his presence (Dass 128). The world that he lives in

offers him no other choice and we see this when the resistance that Dingz was expecting unfolds. The aggression that he is met with justifies why he must approach things in such a forceful manner. In this world that wants to render him invisible, he must make himself visible. What Mhlongo seems to be reiterating throughout the text is that the world he lives in has made him who he is. Particularly in the instance with the financial office, the economic obstacles in Dingz's way shape his decisions. In other instances, we find resources being the obstacles that stand in his way and so in order to survive the dog-eat-dog environment he finds himself in, he must do all that is in his power to survive.

Another aspect of Dingz which is abundantly clear throughout the text is his deceitful nature. His deceit is first shown to us when he finally, after all the commotion in the Financial Aid Office, speaks to Dr Winterburn.

> 'Mmm, so how does your family survive on your mother's three hundred and fifty rand pension?' she asked, pushing my documents away. 'It's really difficult. Our electricity and water have been cut off because the bills have not been paid for the past two years,' I lied. I was not ashamed that I lied. Living in this South Africa of ours you have to master the art of lying in order to survive. (Mhlongo 21)

Dingz's belief in lying being a necessity in order to survive South African society is one that he carries throughout the text. Furthermore, he shows no sign of ever being remorseful about lying because he sees it as so necessary for survival. Warnes suggests that Dingz is justified in his lying because his lies are merely a response to the most fundamental promises of liberation being betrayed (Warnes 550). One such promise being betrayed in this scene at the Financial Aid Office, is the promise made by the government at the time of free access to education. We find that this promise of access to free education is the main reason Dingz goes to cast a vote in the 1994 elections. His brazen nature has a similar justification in that it becomes clear as the text progresses how the society Dingz lives in does not allow him to survive any other way. For instance, when Dingz goes shopping he is helped by Themba (a friend of his from the township) who also seems not to see anything wrong in using deceitful means to help Dingz:

> Themba, one of my township friends, had finally got a job as a cashier at the Moosa Supermarket. From the shelves I took as many goodies as I wanted without even

> bothering to check their prices. At the till Themba would either pass my goodies through without ringing them up, or he would ring up a lesser price. As he was doing this, he would say, 'The rand is weak my friend, we must save money when we have a chance'. (Mhlongo 36)

This idea that stealing goods or lying about the actual value of the goods is a help to his friend also shows in part a shared form of thinking between Themba and Dingz. Both see the necessity of lying to survive. Themba's comment on the rand as a kind of justification for lying shows how he views this act as goodwill toward his friend rather than something that is wrong. This moral flexibility that we see embodied by Dingz runs throughout the text.

In order to emphasise the point, Mhlongo places characters within the text that complement Dingz in the sense of having a shared background, like Theks, Dunga and Themba. These characters also navigate precariously through life due to the pressures of their backgrounds that continue to drive them. They seem to agree and identify with the necessity of lying in order to survive. There are also characters such as Paul, Nikki and Bob who contrast Dingz and his group of friends from the township in the sense that they are white and come from rather privileged backgrounds. Mhlongo uses them to display the way in which privilege continues to exist in post-apartheid South Africa, and how it continues to push people like Dingz further into precarity.

The contrast that exists between these white characters and Dingz is most evident when Paul, Nikki and Dingz are in the same situation but the outcomes for Dingz are different to theirs. The three of them all miss a test, but Paul and Nikki easily find a way out and Dingz lies excessively to not risk getting suspended from his studies. Paul and Nikki without much effort get deferred exams because they obtain letters from their family doctors (Mhlongo 158). This access to a family doctor is not something that Dingz has, alluding to the gap in wealth between him and his white friends. It is alluded to even more when Dingz describes Nikki:

> Nikki was the tall strawberry blonde who had spilt coffee down my back during the political studies lecture. You only had to look at her to conclude that she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth…A couple of weeks earlier she had taken us all, Dwork, Theks and myself, for a snack at the Senate House cafeteria… As she bought the jam

> doughnuts, muffins, Chelsea buns, cooldrinks and juices, I enviously glanced at the banknotes in her purse. They were spread like confetti. After that, seeing her always reminded me of my cashless campus life. (Mhlongo 159)

Dingz describes how in even looking at Nikki, her wealth and privilege is quite evident. In describing her as born with a silver spoon in her mouth, Dingz insinuates that she has never known any real struggle in her life. This is a direct contrast to his life and we see this in how he concludes his description of her. He finds that her seemingly endless supply of cash reminds him of his lack of cash. The disparities between Nikki and Dingz continue to show in a conversation they have regarding his inability to obtain an aegrotat:

> 'Hey, why are you sitting all alone? What's on your mind?'
> It was Nikki, who sat down next to me.
> 'You don't want to know,' I replied sullenly.
> 'Shame! Don't you worry,' she said, as she gently rubbed my back.
> 'I still can't get an aegrotat.'
> 'Ag man, will be all right. Now, put on a happy face and have a cigarette,' she said, offering me a Camel. (Mhlongo 160)

Nikki is not even able to be sympathetic for a moment with Dingz. Her response, if anything, is patronizing, similar to that of Dr Winterburn at the Financial Aid Office, where she claims to understand what Dingz is going through but does not. Nikki does not even try to understand what Dingz is going through. She commands him instead to put on a happy face and says that things are going to be all right when she cannot guarantee that for Dingz, who does not have access to the resources that she has. Nikki's privilege is further revealed in two more ways in this conversation, firstly when she assumes that like her, Dingz must have a family doctor:

> So, why don't you consult your family doctor for a medical certificate?' asked Nikki, lighting a cigarette.
> 'We don't have a family doctor,' I answered brusquely. I was annoyed. I wanted to tell her that our family doctor was a traditional healer who did not issue such certificates, and even if he did it would not convince this varsity's white dean. Ignorance is one of the embarrassing penalties of being rich, I told myself. (Mhlongo 162)

Here Dingz finds himself agitated by Nikki's inability to conceive of a world beyond her own. Nikki's wealth allows her the luxury of ignorance. Secondly, we also see her blinding privilege when the reason as to why she missed the test comes up. Dingz asks her why she missed the exam and her reason is rather trivial and if not trivial, it is an excuse that only the wealthy can afford:

> 'I was very mad that weekend before the exam,' she said, pretending to scowl.
> 'What happened?'
> 'My little Tarbo was hit by a car when we were going walkies to the Cresta shopping mall.' She paused and looked at me.
> 'I was ve-ry ma-d. You know Tarbo and me have been together for the past five years.'
> 'Uhh, it was terrible. You know Nikki called me while she was laying a charge at the police station against the driver,' added Paul with a grimace, as if I was the reckless driver he was talking about. (Mhlongo 162)

Tarbo is Nikki's little dog (Mhlongo 161). This moment in the text is one bitter irony, that exists to highlight how different the worries Nikki has compared to Dingz. Dingz on the other hand, who had decided to miss the test due to feeling ill, had prepared for it because of having written two other exams close to the time that did not go well. What makes the case of Nikki's trivial excuse even worse is that in this conversation that was initially about consoling Dingz, Nikki's dog ends up garnering more sympathy than Dingz. This is seen when Paul continues to share details about the 'ordeal' that Tarbo undergoes:

> 'We took the poor pooch to the vet there by Cresta. I'm telling you Dingz, Tarbo was very scared and confused. You know, I just can't understand how a human being can do such a cruel thing,' he said, slowly shaking his head.
> 'If it wasn't for Paul, who was there for me throughout that ordeal, I just don't know how I would have coped. I didn't eat the whole day and I had to stay at the vet for more than seven hours, hoping that she'd be OK. I was really m-aadd.' (Mhlongo 162)

The irony here is how Paul can see Tarbo as scared and confused and feel great sympathy for it, and yet both Nikki and Paul cannot sympathize in the slightest with Dingz. Both these characters are completely oblivious to his suffering and his possible fear resulting from not

being able to get the aegrotat. Paul sees the cruelty with which Nikki's dog is treated but is not able to see the cruelty that Dingz faces daily. The dismissal of Dingz's problems and further sympathizing with Nikki's trivial problems becomes more ironic as the passage continues:

> Theks ran her hand across Nikki's shoulders to comfort her. 'Shame,' she said. 'It's OK. Thanks to Paul who sacrificed his exams for my Tarbo. She won't forget you as well,' she said, craning her long neck beyond me to look at Paul.
> 'You're more than welcome. That's what friends are for.' There was a pause.
> 'You know I bought this doll in Australia when she was only two weeks old. Since then our bond has been unbreakable,' Said Nikki.
> 'And how is she now?' asked Theks, showing a lot of sympathy.
> 'She is still in the process of recovering. Can you see she limps when she walks?'…
> 'You know she has received more than twenty get well cards from my friends and Dad's staff.' (Mhlongo 162-163)

Again, here the immense privilege that Nikki and Paul enjoy is highlighted. They can miss tests and not fear what may happen because for them, nothing will happen. Both Paul and Nikki could just consult their family doctors and be excused. The same does not apply for Dingz. More salt is added to the wound here when Theks, who also comes from the township like Dingz, shows greater sympathy for this trivial ordeal than for the situation that Dingz is in. Mhlongo highlights the clear privilege of white people like Nikki and Paul – a privilege that eludes Dingz even in the promise-filled new South Africa. Through this moment and others in the text Mhlongo speaks, "[a]gainst faked demises of institutional racism" (Rafapa 9). Through contrasting Dingz with these two white characters, Mhlongo shows how explicitly different their lives are to Dingz. Through their conversation it appears as if these characters live in a completely different reality to Dingz. Through this Mhlongo communicates the idea that these characters flourish because the institutions and structures they inhabit allow for that. Dingz on the other hand does not enjoy the same set of privileges – in fact the picture painted throughout the text is that the institutions and structures that are in place are against him and hinder him in many ways from flourishing. These structures antagonise Dingz and place him in a position where he must fight in order to survive the antagonism.

We also see the way in which others who come from a similar background to Dingz also embody the idea that they must lie to survive in a world that is hostile to their presence. Even Dunga, who is ahead of Dingz and Theks in the sense that he is now working and has a greater sense of security in some way, still exists in a way that is driven by the uncertainty he has always known. This is seen when Dunga helps Dingz obtain a death certificate at whatever cost, even risking his career as a lawyer. Dunga's reason behind helping Dingz seems to be rooted in a like-mindedness with Dingz about the precarity of their lives. Dunga in his own words seems to echo the sentiment that the society they live in does not allow them to live any other way. They must do all that is in their power to survive and that means taking hold of every opportunity they get. Where these opportunities do not arise, they must create them. "You should have told me before you lied about your cousin's death to the dean. I've got friends who could have made a convincing sblivana without any problem,' said Dunga, a knowing grin pasted on his thick lips" (Mhlongo 166). Dunga's knowing grin cheekily suggests that perhaps he has had to make use of such connections in the past. This indicates that even in his 'secure' position as a lawyer, he can never quite let his guard down either – he must be ready at any moment to do whatever is necessary for survival.

From the text we also find that these characters' rationale is not unsubstantiated. Past experiences have shown them again and again how precarious their lives are. We see this as they continue the conversation around hospital documents:

> 'But Broer, you know full well that Themba's grandmother used to be a Bara Hospital nurse. She still has access to the hospital papers… 'In fact, she would have gone to the hospital and asked some of the doctors she knows to write something for you.'
> 'Iyooo!' I said disapprovingly. 'Remember last time Thek's brother lost his job because of her sblivana? When his company called to verify his sickness with the doctor concerned, they found that the telephone number belonged to her shebeen! Her sblivana is suspicious, man.' (Mhlongo 166-167)

This practice of forging documents seems to be a practice that is rather common knowledge to those in the township. It seems that it is among one of the commonly understood ways of surviving the society they live in. The fact that this is a shared survival mechanism shows that Dingz does not simply decide to live in this constant mode of survival, but rather it is his society that forces him and many others to live this way. The precarity that Dingz shares with

others from the township shows that who Dingz and these characters from the township are, is driven by the society they live in. The fact that hustling in this way is presented as a kind of necessity further paints this picture of their precarious lives. It becomes especially clear when Dunga continues to share with Dingz why risk is a necessary part of their lives:

> 'Don't you know by now, mfowethu, that risk is two-fold. On one hand there is the possibility of losing, but on the other hand risk is an opportunity itself. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, my friend. Nearly everything in life is a gamble, including your own existence at Wits. If you look for certainties, you have far to reach and little to find in this world; our very existence is uncertainty itself. So it's not a question of the sblivana working or not working, it is a question of how to make the sblivana work for you. If you adopt this attitude it will force you to think and find ways of getting the aegrotat, mfowethu,' he concluded. (Mhlongo 167)

The notion that within risks there is an opportunity further highlights the precarity of Dingz and many of the characters from the township. Perhaps this moment between Dunga and Dingz is the moment in the text that best describes the precarity that Mhlongo has been pointing to throughout the text. Mhlongo very clearly creates a world that "besets black people with serious and systemic challenges" (Dass 126). His township characters lie, cheat and scheme their way through life because their world does not allow them to live in any other way. Dunga mentions here how certainties are not something worth expecting for those who find themselves in the position that they do. He further advises Dingz that essential to their survival is finding ways and means to make whatever speck of opportunity that arises work for them. Dunga even suggests that in fact a determination is formed as a result of realising how precarious life is for those like him and Dingz, and therefore that anything can become an opportunity if used well. The desperation implicit in his language further emphasises the way in which these characters are formed by their environment. The characters from the township cannot simply be looked at as masters of their own destiny, since there are large systemic obstacles that prevent things from being that simple.

We find that while in his daily life Dingz lies, cheats and schemes his way through, his overall narrative style is rather confessional in that he is open about his own dishonesty, and the dishonesty of his friends and of strangers he encounters. It seems his telling of this narrative serves the goal of telling the truth about the lies. Dass also argues that this allows

for a kind of truth telling. He says that Mhlongo, "rather than hiding his message about what life is like for Black students in obscure language or self-reflexive narrative techniques," chooses to have a foolhardy protagonist who says things as they are (Dass 120). Through this Mhlongo highlights the fraught nature of the society that Dingz lives in where deception and crime are the new kind of morality. Mhlongo points to there being something deeply wrong with a society where deception and crime are a normal means of survival. The suggestion is made throughout the text that this society needs changing. Dingz is not the one who should be called to change because his society prevents him from doing so. His lack of development as a character emphasises this very point.

Through placing characters such as Paul and Nikki as a contrast to Dingz, Mhlongo highlights the divide that exists in the society Dingz lives in. Paul and Nikki clearly hold privileged positions in South African society because of their race, based on the advantages of apartheid. Furthermore, Mhlongo places characters who are like Dingz in the text in order to highlight that Dingz is not simply lazy or not trying hard enough to change, but rather that his society makes it difficult for him and those like him to change. Dingz and his friends from the township lack the resources that those like Paul and Nikki have. Mhlongo's apt characterisation seems to serve the goal of ending "the myth that personal effort for blacks and whites amounts effectively to equal opportunities since the defeat of crass apartheid" (Rafapa 101).

Mhlongo in a sense eradicates this myth through the characters he places in the text and ultimately makes the case for Dingz's lack of agency. Mhlongo does not claim that Dingz does not have any choices because he most certainly does, however due to his society, these choices are severely limited and do not constitute real agency. Agency, as mentioned already, is the ability to deliberate and choose the action that will yield the greatest result. Time and time again Dingz is unable to do this and not due to a lack of trying but rather due to the overpowering structures which have shaped his life and continue to shape it still. As Dlamini puts it "Individuals make their lives, but they do not make those lives just as they please (Dlamini, "Life Choices and South African Biography" 340). Essentially this is what we find in Dingz's life, an ability to make his life but not as he pleases. The social structures within which he is embedded constrain him and further keep him in the marginalized position that he holds in society, allowing him little to no possibility of escape. His inability to escape his conditions is then emphasised in his lack of development as a character. He remains the same

from the very beginning of the text to the end because he is incapable of change. His inability to change however is through no fault of his own but rather it is as a result of societal constraints.

Conclusion

What becomes clear through Mhlongo's use of setting and characterisation is that there is no agency for someone who comes from a place like Dingz. While we do not abandon Cresswell's notion that in as much as a space influences a person, so a person influences a space, Mhlongo's text points to the limitations of such a notion. Through his protagonist Dingz, Mhlongo illustrates a space's overpowering influence on an individual: Dingz, a young black man from a township in South Africa, growing up during Apartheid years, is fundamentally shaped by this environment. The text picks up in 1994, at the end of apartheid and the beginning of democratic South Africa. The time and place in which Dingz exists and who he is in that time and place is paramount. This is made clear in the text, I argue, through the way Mhlongo creates the setting. Although the narrative occurs mainly in the present, Dingz has flashbacks to a past which shapes certain views and experiences that he has in the present. These flashbacks allow the reader to see the clear disadvantages that Dingz had in the past, but also how they still exert influence over his present. Through insights into the past, a clearer picture of Dingz's marginalization is shown.

In showing how the past has shaped his present, his present becomes even more disturbing, as we find that not much has changed for Dingz. His life is anything but free. His present continually reflects the past and shows little promise of a better future and this in part is the horror that the text points to through Mhlongo's use of setting. We find that Dingz has not become the person he is out of his own choosing but rather that space and time shaped him in this way. Through the setting, we are made aware that the society within which Dingz exists is made of structures that are more powerful than him, and these structures control the decisions that he is able or not able to make. Through the setting alone, the argument for Dingz's lack of agency is already made.

In arguing then that these overpowering structures shape Dingz, we move to look at who they shape him into. We find through the course of the text that Dingz is defined primarily by two main things: his foolhardy attitude and his knack for lying. The Dingz that we meet at the beginning of the text is confrontational and deceitful. Dingz is unapologetic about both these

characteristics and states from the beginning how both are necessary for his survival. It is at this point once again that we consider his society and see that Dingz is not just an arrogant and crass young man but rather it is his society that is problematic. Dingz's conviction that lying is a necessary tool for surviving in South African society points to the fraught nature of that society. This is further emphasised when we find that those who are in a similar position to him in terms of marginalization are of the same mind. His friend Themba helps him get free goods at the supermarket, the lawyer Dunga helps Dingz organize a fake death certificate and both do this because they understand the precarity of township life. The viewpoint that Dingz takes of lying being necessary for survival is true for those who are continually pushed to the periphery of South African society. Mhlongo essentially points to the idea that Dingz is not just a liar because he desires to be but rather because he has to be. His society makes a liar of him. What is also shown through characterisation is how Dingz is trapped: where most protagonists develop through the course of a text, Dingz does not and the reason for this is that his lack of character development points to his lack of agency. He is unable to change because he is prevented from doing so, by the society he lives in.

Through these two vital elements of setting and characterisation, Mhlongo points to Dingz's lack of agency. Through him Mhlongo points to the harsh realities of post-apartheid South Africa. As Warnes says: "Mhlongo showcases that there are differences between the present and apartheid however he still makes a point of exposing the disappointments and betrayals of the post-apartheid period" (Warnes 550). The narrative that Mhlongo constructs, points all the more not to Dingz changing in some significant way, but rather to the necessity of change needed in his society. Dingz, as Dass puts it, "[i]s the product of an unjust and exclusionary time and place. It is contemporary South African that requires reimagining, development, perhaps even a revolution" (Dass 126). Mhlongo is saying that agency will continue to be out of Dingz's hands until there is a fundamental change in his society.

Chapter 3: Complex Spaces: The Township as a Site of Pain and Healing in Mohale Mashigo's *The Yearning*

Introduction

In Robert Zemeckis's and Bob Gale's high-grossing screenplay from 1985, *Back to the Future* the protagonist, Marty McFly faces a conundrum: he must travel back to the past to fix the present. The title of this film seems oxymoronic in that one often thinks of going forward to get to the future but in this movie, Marty must travel back in order to restore the possibility of a future. The writer Mohale Mashigo does something similar in her debut novel *The Yearning,* where her protagonist Marubini, the traveller of her text, faces a conundrum of her own and in order to resolve it she too, must revisit the past.

In the previous chapter that discussed Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*, the protagonist, Dingz can also be considered to be a kind of traveller who must navigate a troubled present. Dingz however, is depicted as being stuck in the present in such a way that, according to Dass, "[h]e has neither the time nor the space in which to realise that his life is not simply a series of unrelated ordeals" (Dass 124). In Dingz's life there seems to be no moment preceding the current moment he is living in (at least not on the surface) and so it is as though he is stuck not just in the present but in each moment. This being stuck in the moment emphasises how constrained he is as a character – all his energy goes into navigating the next step. As the narrative progresses, Dingz seems to move back in time. This is shown, for example, when he is expelled from his residence and must move back to the township. The text, in its portrayal of the township as a space of arrested time, suggests that Dingz's present and his past begin to look identical. In contrast, Marubini is able to move away from the township and revisit it on her own terms. Dingz does not have this freedom. However, even Marubini is brought to a halt when unresolved elements of her past rise to the surface. Both texts disrupt a linear sense of time in that they jump between the past and the present frequently through the use of flashbacks. These flashbacks play a significant role in both texts. Dingz's flashbacks seem to highlight how the present, which is supposed to be better, looks frighteningly like the past. Mhlongo does this to emphasise how little change has taken place in Dingz's society. In highlighting this, Mhlongo points to the ways in which Dingz is trapped within a larger structure and that Dingz's individual choices are unlikely to result in meaningful change. In this we see the idea of a static society being brought to the fore. *The Yearning* also makes use

of flashbacks, however Marubini's flashbacks seem to contrast her present rather than mirror it. Initially her flashbacks of a happy childhood seem to interrogate the present as they paint a picture of the past that is better than the present. This changes however, the deeper Marubini goes into her past. It becomes apparent that Marubini experienced something extremely traumatic as a child and this trauma[7] taints all of her experiences after this. It is this trauma that leaves Marubini feeling stuck in the present. Hence the need to revisit the past in order to mend the present and secure the future. For a great deal of the text, the township space is, for Marubini, synonymous with the past which she initially runs away from but for the sake of her healing and moving forward, she must revisit it. The past is not only revisited in memory in this text but also through her physically going back to the township.

Mashigo and Mhlongo, through their varying representations of the township speak to the idea that post-apartheid South Africa is troubled in some sense. Mashigo however speaks in a very particular way about how South Africa is rendered immobile because of not correctly understanding the past or dealing with it. Ronit Frenkel in quoting Rita Barnard echoes a similar idea saying that, "South Africa is currently characterized by a 'stalled present,' where there is no sense of progress into a better future, while the past is also rejected resulting in stasis" (Frenkel 72). South Africa's present is troubled and therefore it seems that to restore the future, there must be a reckoning with the past, a going back. It is only once the past is understood truthfully that there is freedom from this state of stasis. This is what we see mapped out in Mohale Mashigo's *The Yearning* where we see a troubled present, an uncertain future and a past that demands to be revisited.

The Yearning is South African singer, radio presenter and writer Mohale Mashigo's first novel (Crwys-Williams, "Telephonic Interview with Award Winning Author"). It tells the story of a young woman, Marubini coming to terms with her past. This notion is alluded to at the very beginning of the text when Marubini remarks: "Why do we sacrifice so much of the present to hide the past? Why do we take away the future's knowledge of itself in order to make the past seem perfect?" (Mashigo 1). These sentences allude to a secret that is going to be central to the plot of the text. The secrecy around Marubini's past trauma leads to an

[7] According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (3rd ed. DSM) trauma is: "an event that involves a "recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone," noting, however, that the definition and its criteria have various ambiguities and that what constitutes "a recognizable stressor" remains subject to debate (Visser 272).

obscuring of reality that causes her confusion and pain for a great deal of her life. At the beginning of the text, Marubini's present seems idyllic. She is a young black woman with a successful career in the wine industry. She lives a comfortable middle-class life in beautiful Cape Town. Her attractive and caring boyfriend, Pierre, and her attentive and loving best friend, Unathi, surround her with love. It is difficult to imagine a way in which her life could be made better. This picture-perfect present is soon disrupted as Marubini's life begins to unravel. She begins to suffer from unexplainable seizures (unexplainable in that her doctors are not able to find their cause). When she suffers one of these seizures at home, she collapses and injures herself in the process, and is hospitalised. And if the seizures themselves were not strange enough, they are also accompanied by ominous voices in her head and a shadow in the corner of her eye (Mashigo 36).

As the text progresses, more clarity emerges regarding who and what these voices and the shadow are. The climax of the text is reached when it is revealed that these episodes are connected to a traumatic event that occurred in Marubini's childhood. When Marubini was a young girl, she was abducted by her local school's groundskeeper, Banzi. The groundskeeper is the shadow that Marubini keeps seeing in the corner of her eye when she has her seizures. When he abducted her, he raped and physically assaulted her. The voices she keeps hearing during the seizures, of children singing, are the sounds of the school children that she would hear in the time that she was held in Banzi's house on the school grounds (Mashigo 140). Following the incident in her childhood, Marubini suffered many tear-filled nights and her family faced this excruciating reality with her. Marubini's father, a traditional healer, attempted to heal Marubini of this pain by erasing the trauma from her memory completely. This he did by performing a ritual which was thought to be a myth but on Marubini it seemed to have worked and brought the healing that her father hoped for, for Marubini.

In erasing the traumatic memory from Marubini, the titular yearning for the truth is created in her. It is this yearning in Marubini that the entire narrative centres on. The yearning creates a restlessness in Marubini which is only resolved when the truth about her past is unveiled later in the novel. What surfaces during Marubini's journey of seeking out this truth is that the effort of keeping her past from her was not the work of her father alone, but her entire family was also complicit in the matter. Her grandmother and mother knew about the incident and kept it from Marubini all these years. This communal effort of sacrificing the present to hide the past has an important bearing on the commentary Mashigo is making about South African

society in general. In an interview, Mashigo calls South Africa a country filled with secrets and stories that need to be told (Crwys- Williams, "Telephonic Interview with Award Winning Author").

In *The Yearning*, Mashigo seems to warn of the dangers of suppressing the traumatic elements of the past. Furthermore, Mashigo advocates for an embracing of all that brings an individual to the present moment, whether that be triumphs or traumas. Mashigo does not make light of the heaviness of traumas but rather stresses the greater damage that results when any truth remains covered up. The dislocation that Marubini experiences in her present due to the trauma seems to be what South Africa as a whole is experiencing too. The undealt-with trauma of the past makes for an obscured reality. This obscuring of trauma results in a false notion of beauty by eliding what is not beautiful to see: a beauty which holds within its denial is of course a façade. Until this façade is removed, true beauty has no place to exist. Marubini is only freed from the pain of her present once she and her family confront the truth about the past. "[T]he Yearning never stops till we embrace everything that brought us here. In our quiet denial, The Yearning devours us" (Mashigo 1). The yearning remains in her until every element of the past, even if it is painful, is embraced and recognised as being what has brought her to the present. This embracing of the past poses an interesting challenge for Marubini because in moving to Cape Town from Soweto, she attempts to create a space between herself and the past in the township. Ironically to find her healing she is forced to return to the township. The place she associates with pain becomes the place that helps her to heal.

This idea that is presented in *The Yearning* of revisiting the past in order to make sense of the present, is an idea worth exploring and there are several reasons for this. The first is that the text seems to suggest that the alternative, which is suppressing or forgetting the ills of the past, seems to result in a troubled present and no real future or future that is worth having. The second reason is that the text presents to us the idea that it is in remembering this past in its entirety that Marubini can have hope for the future. And finally, what makes exploration of this idea presented in the text worthwhile is rooted in Mashigo's own comments about her text when she says:

> 'We won't talk about the bad things that have happened but prefer to role-play this weird rainbow nation nightmare. Sometimes we rob ourselves of valuable lessons when

> we wipe away memories – be they of apartheid or any kind of trauma. I get that there is a lot of shame and pain in our past but erasing it isn't going to fix anything. This country is such a frustrating place; we bury our stories and memories and wonder why we are in so much pain.' (Malec, "Conversation Issue – Mohale Mashigo talks to Jennifer Malec about The Yearning" n.pag)

This statement by Mashigo points to the importance that the author herself finds in the telling as well as in the unfolding of a story. The benefit of a lesson to be learnt cannot be had without facing the difficult things that teach such lessons. Through *The Yearning* there are lessons to be learned through the grief that Marubini and her family face. However, Mashigo does not make these lessons the point of her narrative per se, but rather focuses on telling the story. The ordinary story about a family and how they navigate through their grief is central to the text. I want to suggest at this point that it is precisely in the text's emphasis on the ordinary that we find a complex view of both Cape Town and Soweto, as well as a very complex view of the characters involved. The notion of the profound possibilities of the ordinary was discussed by Njabulo Ndebele in the 1980s. Ndebele, at the time, was critiquing South African writing for focusing on the extraordinary, which he also referred to as the spectacular. Ndebele of course saw the necessity of the spectacular form, noting that it was necessary for the political climate at the time where the prerogative was speaking out against the atrocities of the apartheid government. However, in the late 80s when apartheid was nearing its end, he noted that this way of writing was also nearing its end. Ndebele critiqued this writing for its very evident limitations, saying:

> [O]ne can come to the conclusion that the convention of the spectacular has run its course. Its tendency either to devalue or ignore interiority has placed it firmly in that aspect of South African society that constitutes its fundamental weakness. South African society, as we have seen, is a very public society. It is public precisely in the sense that its greatest aberrations are fully exhibited. (Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" 150)

It seems that Ndebele not only found that this convention had run its course, but also that it was a good thing for this way of writing to cease, to make way for a new kind of writing. Ndebele in fact found it essential that something change in the trajectory of South African writing as a literature in the realm of the spectacular was largely misrepresenting the ordinary

lives of people. Ndebele in his comments went on to say how in this form of writing, there were aspects of a more interior life which were largely underappreciated: "[o]ne effect of this [form of writing] is the suppression of deep-rooted individual as well as social fears. But not only fears are suppressed: the deepest dreams for love, hope, compassion, newness and justice, are also sacrificed to the spectacle of group survival" (Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" 150). To remedy this situation, Ndebele called for a rediscovery of the ordinary, meaning that the mundane, everyday things which at the time were being viewed as peripheral were to be regarded as central again. Ndebele was putting forward the notion that these ordinary things were the very things that people's lives were made of but because of the largely political nature of South African writing, the ordinary was being cast into the realm of the forgotten. Ndebele was arguing that it ought not to be so. He was saying that to rediscover these things in writing was revolutionary, it was to reclaim a sense of life outside the realm of what the apartheid regime allowed for.

Years later Jacob Dlamini pointed to a similar idea as he reflected on his childhood in his autobiographical memoir, *Native Nostalgia* (2009). In it, he expressed nostalgia, or a fondness toward his upbringing in a township under apartheid. In expressing these feelings of nostalgia Dlamini was not making light of the evil of the apartheid system but highlighting that people's lives were not just defined by the political system of the day. People's lives were more than just a response to the system. Dlamini does what Ndebele had called for all those years ago as he rediscovers the ordinary and in so doing attempts in his text to humanise life in the township. He shows life as being affected by the oppressive system but also being affected by a myriad of other things too. He showcases life in the township of Katlehong under apartheid as being complex. In showcasing this, he moves away from homogenous views that insist that the past was experienced one way by blacks and one way by whites. He says, "[t]here are many South Africans for whom the past, the present and the future are not discrete wholes, with clear splits between them…For many, the past is a bit of this, the present a bit of that and the future hopefully a mix of this, that and more" (Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* 12).

This view that Dlamini presents handles with care the complexities of life. It refuses to paint the township, or black people, or white people with one brush. Rather, it invites a more intricate reading of a space, and of how people experience a particular space. The case being made by Dlamini is of life being lived in the crevices of everyday life, not untouched by the

politics of the day but being made up of much more. In its ordinariness, I argue, Mashigo's text has much to say about trauma, the grief that follows and the possibilities of healing. I explore these themes through Mashigo's configuration of space throughout the text. By following Marubini's experiences of trauma, grief and healing, we follow her experiences of space too. Mashigo connects Marubini's changing attitudes towards the township space with her journey of trauma, grief, and healing. I argue that in rediscovering the ordinary, *The Yearning* brings forth the complexities of interior life. In interiority being brought to the fore, I argue, following Ndebele, that it allows for liberation from what was previously suppressed and needs to be expressed. This necessity of expression is also in essence what Mashigo states is needed in South African society, and what she attempts to do in *The Yearning*. I argue that the ordinary reinstates a complexity to the humanity of the characters in the text and the spaces they exist in. Finally, I argue that the ordinary is better equipped than the extraordinary to address issues in an inviting and engaging way, for our times.

The Township as a Site of Joy and Trauma

For all the perceptions that could be, and often are had about the township, Mashigo through Marubini presents us with a rather different view. As mentioned already, it is quite common for the township to be defined in terms of social struggle or in terms of what it may lack but Mashigo gives us a richer view of this space. Marubini is born and raised in Soweto and her upbringing there is filled with both joy and sorrow (both of which will be discussed). The ambiguous attitudes that are held toward the township she grows up in are evident early on in the text through several statements about the township. The first is when, in a flashback, Marubini shares what her Nkgono (grandmother) thought of Soweto:

> It is an unbelievably hot day in Soweto and Nkgono is on one of her rare visits to us. She has never been shy to share her dislike for Soweto. 'My child ran away to be here. I don't like this place. I never will.' Nkgono was always laughing, even when saying things that seemed tragic. (Mashigo 3)

Further along in the text, in a conversation with Unathi, her best friend, Marubini shares a sentiment about Soweto that is contrary to that of her grandmother's:

> We stare at the sea. I'm thinking that as much as I like Cape Town, Soweto will always be my favourite place, specifically the house where I spent afternoons with my

> Ntatemoholo. My father had left us to follow the Calling and my mother's father had come to stay with us. I'm passionate about the sea, but it's so far away from the place that I love the most. (Mashigo 18)

This ambiguity that is expressed toward Soweto is prevalent throughout the text in that Marubini, in describing the happier parts of her childhood (in her flashbacks), expresses a deep sense of love for the township and yet, she has chosen to move away from there. If this deep love for the space indeed exists, the question that follows is why Marubini would move away from such a space? If we were to contrast Cape Town and Soweto solely on material terms, Marubini's move could easily be attributed to economic reasons and yet even if this were the case- the text reveals that there is more to Marubini's move than this.

As the text progresses, we find that her reasons for loving Soweto yet leaving are tied to the pain which she associates with the township. Before we delve into the pain of the space, let us explore the joy she finds in the space. Although her grandmother expresses a disdain for Soweto, Marubini (especially her younger self) has a rather different view of it. Her most treasured childhood memories were experienced in the township and these memories are closely associated to the time spent with her grandfather. Upon meeting him, he was a stranger who had insulted her by calling her a 'township child'. He called her this because of the mixture of languages that she spoke because she had grown up in Soweto. He was Sepedi and she instead spoke a conglomeration of languages, as township children did and do. Although Marubini was 'insulted' by the comment made by her grandfather, she embraces being a 'township child'. This relationship, although it had a rocky start came to be the sturdiest relationship of Marubini's childhood:

> When or how my vow of silence ended is a mystery. Ntatemoholo possessed magic that could turn anything into a game. All meals were an adventure and there was always a reason to smile or laugh… Now that Ntatemoholo and I were best friends there was no need for crèche. (Mashigo 25)

This feeling of gaiety is what coloured a great deal of Marubini's childhood. The adventures that she and her Ntatemoholo had filled her childhood to a large extent. Time spent walking through Soweto, having tea with neighbours, and growing morogo (wild spinach) with her grandfather is what filled Marubini's life. Up until the trauma Marubini experiences, she has

a happy and rather wholesome childhood, having a loving mother and father and a little brother whom she loves. The warmth of her childhood memories is a reality which she still holds in the present when she refers to Soweto as the place, she loves the most. What is striking in this description of life in the township is that there is a richness to the kind of life that Marubini led. There is a beauty in these ordinary details of her life and this beauty is accentuated by how these details of her life seem to be untainted by the politics that are normally associated with the township. Dlamini points to a similar idea when he discusses township life under apartheid. He says:

> To understand the question of what it means for a black South African to remember his life under apartheid with fondness is to appreciate that the freedom of black South Africans did not come courtesy of a liberation movement… is to say with Lewis Nkosi that not everything people did was a response to apartheid. (Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* 13-14)

This is precisely what is communicated (not always directly) through Marubini's happy childhood in a township in post-apartheid South Africa. Her life with her family, in their community was not merely wrapped up in what was happening socially or economically. Dlamini argues for a depth of life, an interior life, to use Ndebele's words, that is not always subject to what is happening in the public sphere. We see this in Marubini's life when we consider the trauma that she faces, which ultimately causes her to distance herself from the township.

The place which initially provided her with a great deal of joy later inflicts her with a great deal of pain. In the previous chapter I discussed Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*. In Mhlongo's text from the outset the township is an undesirable space. Dingz describes the space as a gorge filled with crocodiles and so the options for him are to escape or to remain facing certain death. Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* essentially depicts conditions in the township as so dire that to survive is to escape. What is interesting however even in the case of Mhlongo's text is that the characters do have other concerns that seem to be separate from the social and economic conditions. The economic and social conditions however seem to quickly overwhelm and overshadow these other things as they seem to affect even the most insignificant aspects of Dingz's life. So much of Dingz's life seems to be defined by these realities that we are given no other choice but to take note of these societal influences. I want

to suggest though that through hyperbolizing these influences, Mhlongo is drawing attention to the immense power that these conditions can have on a life. I do not think that Mhlongo is merely saying that if one is born into the township one is doomed to live a life that is utterly unenjoyable in every way. Mhlongo is not writing as one who is unaware of the ordinary beauty or pain that can exist in the township, but his focus is drawn to elements of society that need to be bettered in order for that beauty or pain to be more richly experienced. In drawing our attention to these exterior factors, Mhlongo reminds us of their importance, because they do affect the interior life. However, to further account for the discrepancy that we find between Mashigo's and Mhlongo's depictions of the township, it is helpful to keep in mind the time period in which these texts were published and are set. Mhlongo's text, while set in 1994, was published in 2004. *The Yearning* is set much later in 2016 and so understandably, the texts are looking at the township from different vantage points.

The sense that we have at the end of Mhlongo's text is of the work that still lies ahead if Dingz is to survive his dog-eat-dog society. This reality is important to point to but the burden that is still felt at the end of Mhlongo's text could lead one to believe that Dingz's life will remain unbearable until his society changes. While it is unhelpful to suggest that structural obstacles do not affect life at all, I would argue that it is perhaps also unhelpful to say that they define life in its entirety. Without intending to do so, texts that just emphasise the exterior or public life can undercut the importance of the interior life. As a result of the broad brush with which life is painted in such texts, life can often be thought of in simplistic and polarising absolutes.

The critique of these kinds of texts is not to condemn them as not having any merit. Of course we note the usefulness of Mhlongo's text when we consider the context. But in the same breath, it is worth pointing to the potential limitations of such texts. Erhard Reckwitz quotes Ndebele saying: "[t]he result of [these texts], according to Ndebele, is 'a literature of surface meanings' where the roles of oppressor and oppressed are assigned on the basis of the all-too-well known political circumstance…" (Reckwitz 153). This "literature of surface meanings" leads to the polarity I have mentioned above. While such texts are often trying to work against the polarity that already exists, their focus on the exterior seems to undo the very thing that they are trying to do. Mashigo, through a necessary ambiguity, allows for a movement beyond these polarising views that are often binary in nature, resulting in a

rejection of anything that falls in between the two poles or extremes. Rather than doing the unifying or clarifying work they hope to do, texts which often generalize an experience such as 'the black experience in the township' can have the opposite effect of polarizing and obscuring. The potential to polarize is clear but the more hidden danger is in the potential that these texts have to obscure. The obscurity arises from a claim or at least a supposed truthfulness in the reality that they present. The general statement becomes what is experienced by the entire group that is being written about. In such writing, "[a]mbiguity or contradiction are completely shut out," because these elements are viewed as elements that take away from what is being said rather than contributing to the discourse (Reckwitz 152).

Mashigo counters this kind of writing in her text. In an interview with Jennifer Malec, she describes "*The Yearning* as an illustration of how the specific can become universal" (Malec, "Conversation Issue- Mohale Mashigo talks to Jennifer Malec about the Yearning" n.pag). The idea of the specific becoming universal is clear in Marubini's childhood, which is initially thought to be filled with joy, only for readers to discover that it is also shrouded in terror. The trauma of Marubini's childhood is what further takes us into the ambiguity of the township space. Although Soweto is the place Marubini loves most in the world, she left it and moved to Cape Town. The reasons that she initially gives for moving away are related to the death of her father and grandfather: "Baba died and so did the garden. All we had was sadness and anxiety. Ma went to bed with it and I woke up in its arms" (Mashigo 8). This image of grief is captured early in the text. The idea of sadness and anxiety going to bed with Marubini's mother and waking up with Marubini in its arms is a role embodied by her father, who became the family's comforter after Marubini was sexually assaulted. After the ordeal, Marubini is traumatised and so is her family and they respond to the trauma in various ways.

> Everything after that is screams: waking up to my own screams; the screams of the principal who first discovered Banzi's charred arm trying to break through the window of his burned room; Ntatemoholo screaming at Ma, 'How could you do that, Makosha?'; Ma screaming when Ntatemoholo collapsed; the screams in my dreams. Then came the crying. Baba came home and took turns holding his wife until she slept then getting up to hold his crying daughter. (Mashigo 145)

These flashes that we are given are an image of the darkness that came to cover the family after the violence that Marubini experiences at the hands of Banzi (the man who sexually abused her). In the text above we see a kind of domino effect of each member of the family falling apart under the crushing weight of this pain. The idea in everything after that time being screams points to the magnitude of the moment for Marubini and her family. This event in Marubini's childhood wreaks havoc in her life and in the lives of her family members. The moment comes to define Marubini in ways that none of them could have anticipated. She is changed in ways that are beyond her control. Her father, unable to bear the burden of seeing his daughter and wife in such egregious pain, decides to use his resources as a traditional healer to make Marubini 'better':

> 'I hate to do this to you but I have to… My teacher once told me a story about a healer who was able to remove something painful from someone he loved. Nobody wants to see someone they love suffer. I was not able to protect you, but I won't let you suffer forever. What kind of healer would I be?' (Mashigo 139)

The thing that her father hates to do but must do is drain Marubini of her traumatic memories of being sexually assaulted by Banzi. Marubini's father believes that this is how he can best help his daughter but later we find that in the long run this causes more harm to Marubini than good.

> The memories drip into the bowl beneath my neck and pool in the sticky black blood. This is not right, I don't feel right and I'm concerned. I want to tell Baba that we cannot keep draining me of my memories and pain like this…It's been too many nights. My body is tired. I'm always confused.' (Mashigo 142)

Here, Marubini is recalling the memory which had been kept hidden from her for most of her life. She finally recalls part of what had caused her so much confusion growing up. These memories that were taken from her obscured a significant period in her childhood. The draining of Marubini's memory removed from her more than just pain, it removed the truth. "The black, gold and platinum drops continue to leave my body. Nobody but me can see them. Nobody but me can see that there is something good being torn away with the bad" (Mashigo 143). This moment is perhaps the most revealing moment in the text. The notion of *The Yearning*, which we are introduced to at the beginning of the text and which afflicts

members of Marubini's family in various ways, is linked to a sense of denying the tragic in the hope that it would make life more liveable (Mashigo 1). This moment, however, exposes how untrue and unhelpful this denial of pain is. If anything, what this denial of pain seems to do is amplify what is already very traumatic and it seems to delay the necessary process of grief.

It is the denial of pain and the ill response to trauma that leads Marubini to remove herself from the township. The township, having been a place of joy, instead becomes a space solely associated with trauma and grief, even if subconsciously. A few things about the text point to this notion of the township as a site of trauma. The first and perhaps most obvious indicator that reveals Marubini's view of the township as a site of trauma is the geographic distance that she places between herself and the township. We see that this distance she has created is not merely geographic or even just social but also psychological. Although she moves away from the township because of the great pain that she has experienced in this space, there is still a kind of conflict that exists within her about the space. She still calls it the place she loves most. Of course, we later find that the pain that she associates with this space is in fact hidden and repressed and therefore she associates the township with a confusion that causes her a great deal of pain. She has distanced herself from it and yet most of her story that she narrates is wrapped up in the township. There is a way in which she almost feels trapped by the space, but does not know why, and this is what becomes more and more traumatic for Marubini. If we consider Irene Visser's expansive definition of trauma we find that what Marubini is experiencing is in line with the very nature of what trauma is:

> Trauma refers not so much to the traumatic event as to the traumatic aftermath, the post-traumatic stage. Trauma thus denotes the recurrence or repetition of the stressor event through memory, dreams, narrative and or various symptoms known under the definition of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. (Visser 272)

What Visser describes here is much of what Marubini experiences when she has her seizures. Vague memories of her trauma resurface. As these memories become unravelled, so, it seems, does her life. In the process of disentangling there is a disruption of linearity. We see this in how the text frequently jumps between the past and the present. This is achieved through the frequent use of flashbacks – flashbacks which are not always necessarily linked to events in the present. At times one even forgets the present or becomes

disassociated from the present and this is because, "[i]n Mashigo's novel, the temporal dislocation that is associated with trauma serves to demand a more creative engagement with time" (Murray 2). The reader, in this sense, is invited into Marubini's subconscious. Through flashbacks, Marubini is confronted with traumatic moments that she had forgotten, and the recurrence of these traumatic memories culminates in the moment in which she finally remembers being raped and beaten by the school grounds keeper, Banzi (Mashigo 140). Upon remembering this moment, Marubini is finally able to make better sense of her confusion and her aversion to the place she once loved.

The difficulty in remembering trauma, according to Jessica Murray, is found precisely in the nature of trauma which is that it is largely inaccessible. Quoting Kilby, Murray points out that the difficulty with trauma is that '[i]n a sense, therefore, there is nothing to remember except perhaps a sense that there might be something to remember' (Murray 2). This 'something' becomes the haunting that Marubini experiences for most of the text and it is only in revisiting the memory and confronting her painful past that the haunting ceases. Trauma disrupts the linearity of narrative and therefore, for Marubini to have a sense of linearity restored she must make sense of the trauma of her childhood. The text does not posit this venture of remembrance and engagement as one that is easy, but it does seem to suggest that there is more freedom in remembrance than in forgetting:

> While Marubini's body continues to speak this unspeakable and unremembered past, it is clear that she needs to remember and to fit the experience into some kind of coherent narrative in order to approximate healing and to stop the seizure type events that render her incapable of functioning. (Murray 2)

Marubini's bodily response to the trauma which for most of the text is unknown to her is not uncommon for those who have suffered violence. According to Allison Crawford:

> [T]hose who have experienced traumatic events often lack a coherent memory for or understanding about the trauma they have undergone; they may be haunted by inchoate bodily sensations and 'memories' that have not been fully integrated and cannot be put into language. (Crawford 702)

In view of this, in trauma studies there has been a move toward, "challenging artificial distinctions between the mind and body arguing instead for 'embodied consciousness" (Crawford 703). The challenging of these distinctions has opened the field of trauma studies and allowed for a more in-depth understanding of trauma. In looking into this possibility of how the body also plays a role in remembering trauma, more light has been shed on how post-traumatic stress might manifest in an individual. We see this in Marubini's bodily response to the trauma of her childhood. Although she initially cannot remember something that can be communicated with words, her body communicates the trauma through her seizures.

The rape and assault which she experienced as a young girl initially cannot be uttered in a declarative or semantic way and so it is communicated somatically. In this sense then her body is truly a site of trauma. This site, unlike the site of the township, however, is one she cannot get away from. Although she can perhaps silence the township by replacing its sounds with the sounds of the sea, she cannot silence what her body in a rather muffled way still communicates. One of the first instances of her body communicating trauma occurs after a meeting with her boss:

> I make my way to my office feeling a wave of nausea rising. A melody creeps out of the corners of my mind and my heart jumps into my throat. I feel its pounding echoing in my empty head, competing with the song. 'Bana be sekolo, bana sekolo…' This is not a thought. It is not a memory. Nor is it something created by my imagination. (Mashigo 30)

The obscurity of what Marubini remembers at this stage of the text points to the idea put forward by Kilby, which I mentioned earlier, that in cases of trauma there is nothing to remember except the sense that there is something to remember. Marubini initially cannot remember these things that her body and her mind keep surfacing and yet they seem deeply familiar. It is also interesting to note how the various parts of her body work together in this act of remembrance; the bodily nausea she feels, the melody in her mind, the sensations she experiences in her heart and throat, the pounding in her head. Marubini's body continues to play a role in remembrance throughout the narrative and one of its louder cries occurs when:

> The song returns. Softer, but somehow more threatening for that. What is that lurking in the shadows at the corner of my eye? With supersonic speed it disappears into the wall. I whip my head around to get a better look. 'O mang? Ke wena mang?' My frightened voice leaps out of my mouth, demanding to know who or what is lurking in the shadows of my mind and of the room. (Mashigo 36)

The threatening song and the shadow lurking at the corner of her eye are events that are initiated by her body, in that they come from her mind or her subconscious. They are occurrences that she experiences but she cannot make them visible or audible to others. In identifying them as being of her but also other, she interrogates them. In the process she experiences dissociation[8]. In part, she feels estranged from herself. This estrangement from herself continues in the text as she experiences more of these flashbacks:

> A table … No, a bed. It's too dark to make out clearly. The projection of an epoch long forgotten floats in the dim corner of my sitting room. Like a photograph rocking back and forth on the waters of a deserted river. Not seeking to be found or remembered but just floating there, following the currents of the water, not aware of its purpose or history. The darkness smells like damp … mildew, so strong it clings to anything within its reach. (Mashigo 36)

These memories that Marubini carries have in them a vague familiarity. She grabs at certain parts of them, but other parts seem to loosen themselves from her grip. They seem to be memories that may belong to someone else and yet they are her own in that they are mapped all over her in bodily sensations. The description of this memory as, "The projection of an epoch long forgotten," alludes to the very idea of these familiar but unrecognizable memories. According to Crawford, incoherent memories are commonplace in victims of trauma. The incoherent memories form from the mind and body's attempt at dissociating from the trauma (Crawford 702).

[8] The current (fourth) edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) defines dissociation as "a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception of the environment" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 519). Many psychologists and psychiatrists view dissociation as a coping mechanism designed to deal with overpowering stress. (Atchison & McFarlane 48)

It is quite evident in the text that Marubini cannot remove herself from the trauma she experiences, whether it be through moving away from the space she subconsciously associates with the trauma or through her father's ritualistic removal of her memories. The trauma stands at the door knocking, demanding to be spoken to, dealt with. This open onto the necessity of grief, another important aspect of the text.

The Township and the Necessity of Grief

Earlier I mentioned that Mashigo points to the importance of pain needing to be felt. Mashigo states that she believes that much of South Africa's pain is due to not grieving and instead suppressing what is tragic or difficult. Mashigo clearly works this idea into *The Yearning*. Already we have seen how Marubini's family tried in various ways to get over the pain as quickly as possible rather than go through it as thoroughly as possible. The unfolding of the events of Marubini's story suggests rather strongly that this pain needs to be experienced. What is grievous needs to be grieved. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence, Judith Butler* points to the value that can be found in loss and grief. In commenting on loss, Butler states that "[l]oss has made a tenuous "we" of us all" (Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics" 20). According to Butler, loss insofar as it is an experience that we all share has the potential to unify us. If we consider loss as Butler views it, as having the potential to unite, it changes how we might consider the losses that Marubini's family incurs. While this experience that they have together has the potential to serve as a unifying agent, it does not perform this function in their lives and the reason for this, I believe, is because they deny the pain that they feel. In offering their pain no place to be felt, they lose a great deal more than they bargained for. Mashigo points us to this at the very beginning of the text in one of Marubini's monologues where she says:

> Why do we sacrifice so much of the present to hide the past? Why do we take away the future's knowledge of itself in order to make the past seem perfect? My brother only knows a father when he looks in the mirror. The Yearning haunts him. My mother turns away from the traditions of the past. The Yearning confuses her. I speak as only half of myself. The Yearning hurts me… The Yearning never stops till we embrace everything that brought us here, in our quiet denial, The Yearning devours us. (Mashigo 1)

These words that are spoken by Marubini point to how something is missing in her family because of the denial of the tragic. What we see in Marubini's life is that hiding the trauma causes continual pain and hinders healing.

The lack of healing is evident in Marubini's family and we see it first in Marubini's father. In draining her of her pain, he becomes the guardian of her pain and to protect her, he concludes that he must remove himself from her life completely: "I was carrying that black blood of yours with me everywhere I went. I was too afraid to leave it here. It was weighing all of us down. I carried it in a bag with me day after day, under my shirt. I was the guardian of your pain, Marubini" (Mashigo 177). To further guard his family from pain, Marubini's father fakes his own death. However, towards the end of the text when Marubini is in a trance state which allows her to recall things from the past, she comes to the knowledge that in fact her father is alive but that he had to leave so that her pain would not return to her. The result of this is not as Marubini's father had hoped. His attempt to guard his family from pain causes greater pain than he intended. The notion of refusing pain is something that Mashigo seems to caution against throughout the text.

The damage caused by denying pain is most clearly evident in Marubini. In her case, the choice to deny the pain she experienced from Banzi was not voluntary. This choice was made for her by the family, particularly her father when he performs the ritual of removing her memory. Her family is complicit in the denial in the sense that they knew what was being done to her and never told her. The result of her being denied the truth causes a great deal of confusion. Marubini is under the impression (for most of her life) that the source of her pain is the death of her grandfather and her father and so she proceeds to make every attempt to distance herself from that pain and trauma. The pain of losing her grandfather is clear when she reflects on what he meant to her: "Ntatemoholo was the light of my life; he raised me. I often wish that he hadn't died, and then maybe I wouldn't be in Cape Town, away from everything that I love and grew up around. I never felt the same after he and Baba both died" (Mashigo 43). The deaths of these father figures hurt Marubini in a way that she herself cannot completely understand. This echoes Butler's reflection on loss as not entirely transparent: "[W]hen we lose someone, we do not always know what it is in that person that has been lost. So when one loses, one is also faced with something enigmatic: something is hiding in the loss, something is lost within the recesses of loss" (Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics" 21).

This enigmatic grief that Marubini experiences drives her to do the only thing that makes sense to her and that is to remove herself from the site of her pain, the township. Grief leads to a feeling of being lost or displaced, and this is what we see in the case of Marubini. After losing her father and grandfather she experiences loss, but something also remains hidden in the loss, as Butler suggests. Since Marubini's trauma is also hidden from her, the elusive nature of loss is exacerbated. This confuses and hurts Marubini so much that she removes herself from anything that triggers the pain. In view of this it can be said that perhaps it is not so much that she left the township as that she was pushed away by this deep sense of loss. In not grieving the pain that they have all experienced, the various members of her family all feel lost and to mask that feeling, they attempt in their various ways to restore order amid the chaos. Butler points to the danger of this when she says, "[w]hen grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly" (Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics" 29). In moving to Cape Town for example, Marubini attempts to order her life. However, the fantasy of this reordering is exposed when her life in Cape Town comes undone. Following the violence she faced at the hands of Banzi and then the subsequent death of her grandfather, the former pain and loss gets elided for the latter loss. We see this when she shares how she felt after her grandfather died: "Ntatemoholo was the only thing that made sense in my world. Now he was gone, and I couldn't remember a lot of things. Some days it felt like I just woke up and Ntatemoholo was gone and then other days I didn't know where he was or what had happened to him" (Mashigo 43). To understand the destabilising nature of losing her grandfather, it becomes important here to note that at this stage of the novel, Marubini had not yet remembered the sexual assault which she experienced as a young girl. As a result of this Marubini links the world not making sense to losing her grandfather and while this loss would be sufficient to cause such grief, we are later informed that there was more that she lost during this time.

The text suggests that Marubini's inability to grieve all her losses is what comes to haunt her and make her ill. The text makes it quite clear that tragedy is not something that can be avoided. It makes sense too then that grief as a result of trauma cannot be avoided either, and yet this is what Marubini and her family attempt to accomplish. They avoid the necessary process of grief and this, ironically, causes them more grief. The second wave of grief so to

speak seems even more elusive than the first and this is seen most clearly in Marubini's life. It is only towards the end of the text when Marubini's trauma is finally known and grieved that healing begins for Marubini and her family.

The Township as a Place of Healing

It is only once all these previously hidden details of her childhood are uncovered that she can narrativize her life and therefore find healing or at least be able to live in the present. When one considers the elusive nature of trauma, one sees why the township comes to represent trauma and grief in Marubini's life. Soweto is continually this place of frustration for Marubini until she uncovers what is truly haunting her. This haunting exists as the feeling of yearning. Until this yearning is satisfied, she speaks, "[a]s only half of [herself]. The Yearning hurts [her] (Mashigo 1). More than the losses she incurs when her grandfather and father passed away, there was a loss that Marubini (for most of her life) could not identify. This made grief more elusive than it ought to be and thus healing was also made almost unattainable.

The change of the township from a space of trauma and grief to one of healing is by far the most transformative shift that Marubini undergoes. This watershed moment in the text occurs when Marubini is finally forced to return to the township, for her cousin's wedding. It is during this time of celebration when her family is together for the first time in a long time that Marubini begins to have dreams where she recalls some of the events of her life. When their torment and confusion become too much however, she finally turns to her grandmother and mother for answers. When her mother refuses to tell her the truth about her childhood and why she cannot remember certain events, Marubini turns to her grandmother. Her grandmother, who also practiced as a traditional healer, like her father, leads Marubini into a trance-like state:

> She is burning impepho and something else that my senses seem to recognize. I hear her breathing get deeper as she starts to meditate and connect with the ancestors. Baba did this often… Even though Ma didn't want Gogo to perform this ceremony on me, she came along with us. She still hasn't told me what this is about, saying only that if I want to do this then I should. (Mashigo 134)

As Marubini falls into this state, she remembers it because it is a state she has been in before, years ago when her father was removing her memories from her. Here we see the transformative nature of this moment, when the ritual which previously was used to suppress memories is now being used to resurface them again. In some sense, the shift of the township as a space of trauma and grief to one of healing occurs in this instance. The space that once took painful memories away from her is now giving them back to her:

> "Gogo's glottal meditating is rocking me into a peaceful space. It is a place that seems familiar, like a house that I left many years ago. Nobody has changed a single thing about this house. All the rooms look the same. I have left pieces of myself in parts of the house. They are suspicious of me: 'Where have you been? Why did you go?' Why would I need to separate myself from myself? (Mashigo 135)

This reckoning that Marubini has with herself is a moment of homecoming for her. These memories of a time long ago in this home that she left seems to be synonymous to the positioning of the township in her life. In moving to Cape Town, Soweto becomes a distant memory. What is revealed in this instant however is that these memories cannot be simply removed from her without her losing a part of herself. This explains the confusion that she experiences for most of her life. The pain that results from her being separated from herself is quite clear throughout the text but culminates in this moment. It is a moment that shows the sheer impossibility of her being separated from herself without the separation causing extreme damage. It is in this state that Marubini begins to remember her entire childhood in the order that it occurred. She recalls being kidnapped and being sexually assaulted by Banzi. She recalls how that pained her grandfather, how it pained her mother and led her mother to burn Banzi alive while he was asleep in his house. Then she is reminded of how this further hurt her grandfather and how not long after this he suffers from heart issues and shortly after, dies. She then also recalls her father removing her memories from her mind, and in her trance-like state she comes to the knowledge of events that are not even in her memory. She discovers for example that her father is alive but because he was the guardian of her pain, he had to leave to ensure the pain never returned to her. This shocking revelation that Marubini has keeps her in this state for a few days and when she finally wakes up, she is crying: "I'm crying, and I don't know why. They [her family] gather around me and ask me how I feel. 'Sore.' I mean that physically and emotionally" (Mashigo 149). After this experience that Marubini has, she is different and her family in a sense is also different because the yearning

that they have all had is in some sense satisfied. There are shifts in familial relationships because the truth has finally been revealed:

> Inside of me, there is a lot going on. My mind is shuffling memories into place that had become arid.
> Ma sighs. 'I should never have let Jabulani do what he did, but he was afraid of what the constant fear and pain would eventually do to you.'
> 'It's okay, Mama. I know you did it to protect me.' (Mashigo 150)

This shuffling of memories that occurs in Marubini marks one of the most significant moments in the text. It is significant because of how it marks a moment of narrative order being restored. The text traces this gradual embracing of the truth through Marubini's changing attitudes towards the township. At the beginning we noted how the township, although initially marked with joy at the early points of Marubini's childhood, soon becomes a place of trauma after her kidnapping and sexual assault. For most of her life however, Marubini believes the deaths of her grandfather and father to be the sources of this trauma and she later finds that there was much more to it than these instances. Before she uncovers the source of her trauma, the township becomes to Marubini a site associated with grief. The irony however is that, until she uncovers her trauma, this sense of grief is misguided. Marubini believes she is grieving over the loss of her two father figures, but she later discovers that she unknowingly is also grieving the violation that her body underwent when she was sexually assaulted. Her psyche and her body furthermore grieve over the memories that were removed from her. She is unable to be her full self until these memories are restored. When the truth finally surfaces, the parts of her that were missing are restored to her. She heals or begins to heal once she embraces every part of her past. To embrace even what is tragic is not to discount the tragedy, but rather to acknowledge it and mourn appropriately and become aware of how the tragedy has formed her in ways she cannot undo.

Finally, in this embrace, healing begins. The township becomes a space of healing, and it seems that life can continue again. This continuation of life is evident in one of the final moments of the text when Marubini's mother realizes that some of the bodily sensations that Marubini experiences are not just related to her past but to the future as well. This realization leads Marubini's mother to laugh uncontrollably:

> It occurs to me that I haven't see her laugh like this in years. My mother has been so wrapped up in this big, dark secret that she was carrying that she was living a laboured life. There is music in this laughter of hers. She is laughing a painful melody of freedom. Freedom that she never thought would be hers because, being my mother, she would have taken our secrets to the grave with her. Her laughter slows down finally and then falls back into her chest. (Mashigo 171-172)

The continuation of life in the text takes on a very literal form in that Marubini's mother laughs because she realizes that her daughter is pregnant. She realizes that some of the bodily sensations that Marubini had experienced such as nausea and constant hunger were not related to Marubini's desire to know the truth, but to her pregnancy. However, in this laughter related to the realization that her daughter is pregnant, Marubini's mother begins to experience a release she had not previously known. Inasmuch as the trauma and grief were communal and affected Marubini's entire family, so too is the healing. The burden was shared, and it being lifted brings relief to Marubini's family as well. When Marubini finds out that she is pregnant, this means the birth of new life in a very literal way. Not only can Marubini's life continue, but the baby she is carrying seems to symbolize a future that now exists which previously did not. This healing is further solidified when Marubini joins in on the laughter as well: "The laughter reaches into my bones and pulls out the black sticky stuff that has been plaguing me at night" (Mashigo 172). These passages suggest a sense of healing that occurs in Marubini and arguably alters her perception of the township. This space which she desired to keep at a distance for so long, finally catches up with her and in fact offers her the healing she hoped to find when she ran away.

It is clear then that this final shift of the township becoming a space of healing has profound implications not just in what it offers Marubini, although we note her healing as undoubtedly profound. The further implications are tied up in the value that is to be found in the ordinary. Mashigo's text seems to almost bypass the social, political and economic conditions surrounding the township space and the style of writing identified as 'the spectacular' by Ndebele. Marubini's story does not seem to speak to larger social conditions. What the text does instead is depict how under all kinds of social conditions, "[p]eople are always trying and struggling to maintain a semblance of normal social order" (Ndebele, *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 55). Mashigo in her text confronts us with the painful reality of trauma, the grief that follows and the redemption which can result

from it. What Dlamini says of people's views of their lives under apartheid is also fitting when viewing Mashigo's story, namely that, "the meaning of [the] story is 'slippery, the lessons it teaches complicated and [at times] unclear' (Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* 9). This is worth noting because Mashigo's text does not offer the conventional view of the township or even the conventional protagonist hailing from the township, whose life is a struggle because of the economy or the social conditions. Mashigo instead offers us a protagonist whose view of the township is more complicated than this. The protagonist is not the hero who must fight against the villainous system. In Marubini we find her struggle to be more internal than external. Her challenges are far more private and idiosyncratic than those of a township protagonist like Mhlongo's Dingz. Some would perhaps not even consider her a 'township' protagonist because her struggles are not directly related to her social conditions. It is not clear whether her family who comes to her aid are heroes or villains. It seems that through the very mundane and personal nature of their problems that they are neither, they are just people. Perhaps the question which would follow is what kind of people? They are the individuals that Mashigo introduces to us. We do not know more about them than what we are offered and whilst we may make assumptions, the nature of the text seems to hope that our assumptions will be as nuanced as the characters depicted. Perhaps that we will keep in mind the many things that shape them, their imperfection, their need for redemption.

Conclusion

And what will we make of the township space? Precisely what the text depicts, namely that it is complex, it is nuanced. The township's meaning is fluid and is not spoken of here in the conventional sense where it is a site of abject poverty – for Marubini, its meaning is more slippery. Its meaning also shifts and changes as the text progresses. In one sense, it is orientated around Marubini's experiences and in quite the other it is not. These experiences, though specific to her, also have some bearing on a more generalised experience of township space in South Africa. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a correlation can be made between Marubini's stasis and the stasis that exists in democratic South Africa. Marubini has faced trauma and grief which she has not dealt with, and this leads to her stasis. It is only in coming to terms with trauma and grief and properly understanding it that she begins to heal. Something similar might be helpful to address South Africa's stasis, its lack of transformation. Perhaps in coming to terms with our violent past and how it has formed the present, there could be healing. This, however, is not a simple process and the complex nature of the text points to this: there is much pain and grief before healing can take place.

The text in its focus on the mundane draws out this nuance. It points to the necessity of being able to narrate one's story coherently in order to make sense of oneself. This again may prove helpful for South Africa. Lastly, what the novel makes clear is that this work of healing is not accomplished through some generic or prescribed means, but rather through an awareness of the complexity of the specific circumstances with which people are faced. Mashigo's unconventional depiction of the township space suggests that what might seem individual or specific has potential for wider inference. Changing views of the township point to the multitude of possibilities that exist for a space: even though it may be one thing, it can become quite another. This opening up of possibilities is the beauty of this novel's representation of township space.

Chapter 4: The Place of Relationships in the Township: An Analysis of Redi Tlhabi's *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing*

Introduction

"Human beings are more than the sum total of their politics – or of their choices" (Dlamini, "Life Choices and South African Biography" 345). This statement by Jacob Dlamini, made in the context of writing about Redi Tlhabi's memoir in the short essay "Life Choices and South African Biography", points us to what has already been made quite apparent in my previous chapter. How people come to make the choices that they do, especially when situated in difficult socio-economic circumstances, is what Dlamini discusses in his essay. Dlamini focuses on the idea that people, "do not live entirely in a world of their own making," especially during apartheid (Dlamini, "Life Choices and South African Biography" 343). Apartheid restricted the freedom of many in very direct ways. However, even under apartheid, and this is Dlamini's key point, individuals could be presented with the same set of circumstances and still make decisions that differed greatly from one another.

This is also the issue that Redi Tlhabi confronts in *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing*. In delving into her own life story and that of her friend Mabegzo, she asks what it is that leads a person to make one decision over another. *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing* is an autobiographical memoir by Redi Tlhabi, a journalist, activist, runner, and former radio show host (Malingo, n.pag). Tlhabi's memoir, spanning five decades, is a coming-of-age story with a twist: even though the narrative is largely about Tlhabi's life, it simultaneously tells the story of Mabegzo, an infamous gangster who befriends the young Tlhabi. Tlhabi's story is divided into two main parts. In part one, Tlhabi details her upbringing in a Sowetan township (Orlando East) under apartheid, and her unusual friendship with Mabegzo, who at the time was 22 (about double Tlhabi's age).

The second part of the text takes place a decade into South Africa's democracy and two decades after Mabegzo's death. In both part one and two Tlhabi narrates her life, whether it is her childhood in part one or snippets of her adulthood in part two. What makes Tlhabi's autobiographical memoir unusual is its detailed preoccupation with Mabegzo's life. Tlhabi weaves Mabegzo's story so deeply into her own that at certain points in the text one wonders

if this story really is about Tlhabi. This unique stylistic choice sustains a major theme in Tlhabi's work, namely how deeply embedded individuals are in social structures, and specifically how a lack of nurturing relationships can have major consequences in one's life. In combining her story with Mabegzo's she highlights the fact that people do not exist in a vacuum but in communities that shape them in certain ways. Her friendship with Mabegzo is just one of many examples that she weaves into the text. The antithetical friendship between Mabegzo and Tlhabi comes about shortly after Tlhabi loses her father, who was violently murdered on the streets of Orlando East in the 1980s. When Tlhabi is initially approached by Mabegzo, she is unaware that he is the infamous gangster whom so many in Orlando East had come to fear. It is only after her initial encounter with him that she is informed by people in her neighbourhood that it was near miraculous that she encountered him and walked away unscathed (Tlhabi 51). Tlhabi initially anticipates harm after this close encounter with Mabegzo but is perplexed when he continues to be every bit the kind gentleman, he was during their first encounter. This deep care that Mabegzo continues to display towards her is initially quite perplexing to Tlhabi but eventually she embraces it, and it holds true for the duration of their friendship.

Mabegzo, like Tlhabi's father, is eventually murdered. After Mabegzo's death Tlhabi is once again mourning, only this time she cannot do so publicly as her community finds relief and not grief in Mabegzo's death. To those living in Orlando East at the time, Mabegzo's death signifies freedom from the terror he caused – whether directly or indirectly (Tlhabi 3). It is this bitter moment of seeing people rejoice over the death of someone she loved that is etched in Tlhabi's memory and propels her to write the book. After his death, the memory of Mabegzo continues to haunt her, so much so that she starts the preface of her text by saying, "I cannot remember a time when I was not thinking about Mabegzo, the subject of my book" (Tlhabi vii). This haunting that Tlhabi experiences has less to do purely with missing Mabegzo and more with the bitter feeling that she recalls when thinking about the double meaning of his death. For her it was a moment to grieve someone who was loving and affectionate. For her community it was a moment to rejoice over the death of someone who had been a source of fear and terror. From this arises an inner conflict for Tlhabi: she wonders how Mabegzo was able to be one thing to her and another to her community. Furthermore, for her, in knowing that he was a rapist and murderer, how is it that she still loved him? Through a series of interviews with people who were family or friends of Mabegzo, Tlhabi sets out on a quest to uncover the paradox of his life. She uncovers the fact

that Mabegzo was conceived through the gang-raping of his mother. And if this were not traumatic enough, the violence done to his mother is perpetuated by the community around them. Mabegzo's mother is treated like a curse after she is raped and Mabegzo grows up being called a rape-child. He is treated awfully because of this label, not only by other children but even more so by the adults in his community. This traumatises Mabegzo and is a large part of what drives him to a life of crime. Of course, there are other factors that lead him to crime – some obvious and others not so much – but Tlhabi seems to spend a great deal of time focusing on the relational aspect of his childhood and upbringing. The text indicts the family and the community who mistreated an initially innocent little boy and exposes the hypocrisy of their surprise when he became a criminal.

By focusing on Mabegzo's mistreatment by his community as a little boy, Tlhabi centralises the importance of relationships in forming people. It is upon this insight that I build my central argument in this chapter, namely that relationships are a crucial part of what shapes the dynamics of the township space. The township is actively shaped by those who live in it. Of course, there are other factors that shape it too, but Tlhabi turns our attention to the community of people who occupy the township. The reality in the story of Mabegzo is that there are many young men like him who grow up and become criminals. Some turn to crime for reasons that are not clear but sometimes (as in the case of Mabegzo) the reasons (or at least some of them) are quite clear. Those who should look out for him do not; on the contrary, he is often treated cruelly. Added to that is the central trauma of rejection that haunts him: his perceived rejection by his mother, a misunderstanding that is never rectified during his lifetime. What is crucial to note here is how deeply affected Mabegzo was by the lack of nurturing relationships in his life. Nurturing is characterized by availability, sensitivity, and warmth in responding to children's needs. In their study on the impact of nurturing relationships in childhood, Finkelhor, Hamby and Holt conclude that "[t]he family is […] central to the development of self-concept and social competencies that contribute to well-being and increase children's resiliency to adversity" (Finkelhor et al. 210). Mabegzo's family experience is characterised by maltreatment rather than nurturing and this leads to behavioural problems in Mabegzo. According to Finkelhor et al. this is to be expected, since "[o]vert family conflict and anger, deficient nurturing, unresponsive or unsupportive parenting, and family environments characterized by stress, instability, and turmoil are associated with a wide range of emotional and behavioural problems in children" (Finkelhor et al. 211). In the case of Mabegzo the deficient nurturing goes well beyond his immediate

family environment – the wider community also mistreats him. This, in part at least, shapes Mabegzo and leads to much of his emotional and behavioural problems. For most of his life he experiences no nurturing, or at least none that he can remember.

This nurture-deficient environment that Mabegzo grows up in seems to have been void of nurturing even before his birth. We see this in how his mother is treated after she is raped and conceives Mabegzo. While pregnant, Imelda is mistreated by her community who treat her as though the rape were her fault, or something she had wished upon herself (Tlhabi 186). As a result of the stigma she faces from her community, Imelda's mother, Mabegzo's Nkgono (grandmother), sends her away to family in Lesotho to keep her from the cruel eyes of the community in Orlando East. But even though Imelda is "protected" from the stigma of the community, Mabegzo is not. At age 4 he is taken from Lesotho back to Soweto by Nkgono without Imelda's consent. The reasoning behind this decision is apparently to secure Imelda's marriage prospects which would have been hindered had her in-laws known she had a child and so Nkgono takes Mabegzo to go live with her and her husband. Imelda marries and is then forced to continue to keep Mabegzo a secret. From this moment on, Mabegzo is never reunited with his mother, and this leaves deep emotional scars in the young boy. The traumatic separation from his mother proves to be fatal for Mabegzo and it turns out to be one of the pivotal factors that drive him toward a life of crime. Although a life of hard criminality such as the kind Mabegzo undertakes is an extreme response to being separated from his mother, it is also not entirely surprising. Howard, Martin and Berlin have shown that "[c]hildren who [experience] a separation from their mother prior to the age of five years old are likely to suffer psychological trauma" (Howard et al. 12). Mabegzo's story corroborates this phenomenon. He never seems to recover from the sense of loss that he experiences in being separated from his mother, and the trauma is soon followed by aggression. Tlhabi heart-achingly relays the pain Mabegzo experienced when she tells his mother "[h]ow his heart longed for her, how he waited and finally despaired" (Tlhabi 183).

Mabegzo grows up believing that his mother rejected him because he was conceived through rape. Because of this, Mabegzo is robbed of the nurturing care that could have made him more resilient and perhaps altered the trajectory of his life. This feeling of rejection seems to affect Mabegzo all his life. The way in which it affects him is potently reflected in Tlhabi's words to his mother when she says: "He was on a mission to destroy his enemies, and

especially the men who wronged you. In the end he destroyed himself" (Tlhabi 183). Here Tlhabi conveys the reality of what this ongoing rejection and pain did to Mabegzo.

This area of his life was not the only source of Mabegzo's pain. Tlhabi finds that another deep area of pain that steered him toward a life of crime is the way in which his community treated him. Katlego, a childhood friend, shares in an interview what a happy child Mabegzo was and how as a young boy he hated seeing injustices committed against others. Tlhabi, perplexed at how he became a perpetrator of such violent crimes, asks Katlego:

> 'So where did this monster come from?'
> 'The monster was created by the adults who made him feel useless. He figured that if they thought the worst of him when he did good things, he might as well do bad things to earn the scorn they were already heaping on him.' (Tlhabi 139)

This revelation by Katlego is a telling one as prior to it he mentions how the community had long stigmatized Mabegzo, calling him a rape-child even as a young boy. They treated him as though he were a leper. Adults would tell their children to keep away from him, as though he was carrying some disease that he could pass on to them (Tlhabi 137). The ostracization that Mabegzo is subjected to amplifies the trauma he is already experiencing of separation from his mother. Through being ridiculed by those around him, he experiences a further separation from his community. Though Tlhabi herself is initially not convinced by what Katlego says, as she argues that he is perhaps making excuses for Mabegzo, in hearing more of his story she comes to the realisation that perhaps Katlego's assessment is correct. While individual agency and the choices an individual makes are something to consider, individuals do not exist in a vacuum. Humans are communal beings and therefore in a larger sense individuals and the choices they make are formed by the community that surrounds them. Hartling describes the concept of relational resilience as a framework to make sense of these dynamics, in that they offer:

> a profound reframing of the source of human ability to overcome adversities, hardships, and trauma. [Jordan] challenged us to move beyond a highly circumscribed focus on individual, internal traits to a broader and deeper examination of the relational dynamics that promote growth in the face of hardship. (Hartling 52)

Resilience is not merely an individual or internal trait but is forged within "growth-fostering relationships" (Hartling 52). And by implication, when one lacks growth-fostering relationships, one will most likely lack resilience, or what Hartling terms "the ability to achieve good outcomes in one's life after experiencing significant hardships or adversities, such as poverty, family discord, divorce, lack of access to educational opportunities, racism, etc" (Hartling 53).

The trajectory of Mabegzo's life begins to make more sense in these terms, and what Katlego points out about the adults in his life making him a monster begins to have a bit more traction. Mabegzo lacked key relationships that could have promoted growth and strengthened resilience, the consequences of which are manifested in his deviant behaviour. Without the necessary care that every human needs, his behaviour deteriorates to the point of criminality. Through Mabegzo's life, Tlhabi's eyes are opened to the growth–stifling impact that an environment without care can have on an individual. Tlhabi draws this idea out in her text through the way in which she narrates a variety of relationships. She points to the detrimental impact on Mabegzo of feeling rejected and unloved. Her narrative, however, seeks to affirm the positive life-changing impact that being nurtured and taken care of can have. We see examples of nurturing in Tlhabi's life but also in Imelda's life and it seems that their lives are the better for it. In depicting the nature and importance of relationships Tlhabi points us to the notion that individuals do not exist in a vacuum – "Mabegzos'" do not exist in a vacuum. Their formation is reciprocally created and enabled by a community. The purpose of interrogating the nature and impact of relationships is clear in Tlhabi's opening, when she declares:

> Long after he had died, I wondered if his life could have been different had he been brought up differently. With every news item about a young man who has raped, murdered or robbed someone, I have found myself asking, is this another Mabegzo? Where do these criminals come from? Who raised them and was there ever a time in their lives when they had hopes and dreams and their laughter filled the air? (Tlhabi vii)

In opening her text with these questions, Tlhabi immediately points us to the pivotal role of relational sociality in her narrative. Grace Musila addresses this topic in Tlhabi's work in her article: "Lot's Wife Syndrome and Double Publics in South Africa". Musila recounts the response of one reader to whom she recommended Tlhabi's memoir, who said the story was

"[…] so familiar to township residents so as to border on the cliché" (Musila 1456). This reader and other scholars to whom Musila points, though they commend Tlhabi's text and texts like hers as being well written, nonetheless critique them because they "[e]njoy the endorsement of the white, South African literary establishment and because they are books that tell white people what black people are like without disrupting white comfort in South Africa" (Musila 1456). Now while there might be some truth to the critique levelled at Tlhabi's text – that it perhaps appeals to the white literary establishment, I nonetheless argue that those who view Tlhabi's text in these terms alone miss the significance of her unique angle on the role of relations and relationality at the heart of township life. Tlhabi's approach of personal reflection on Mabegzo's life in the township reaches beyond cliché. Arguably, this approach widens the appeal of Tlhabi's text in that it interrogates the nature of relationships in a community from the perspective of their potential to nurture or neglect an individual. The relational texture of this narrative is found firstly in Tlhabi's fascinating framing of her autobiographical memoir. Rather than having the text revolve around her, Tlhabi's text revolves around Mabegzo. Tlhabi makes it apparent early on that their unusual friendship is the reason that Mabegzo occupies such a large part of her autobiographical memoir. After losing her father, Mabegzo seems to step into the role of a father figure to Tlhabi, caring for her and protecting her in certain ways. The role he played in her life shaped her and had a significant influence on who she became.

What continues to trouble Tlhabi, however, is the question of who Mabagzo was to her, compared to who he was to others and society at large. While he cared deeply for her, Mabegzo did not show the same care to others. To his community he was a criminal whom they were all too glad to be rid of once he died. Part of what is unique in Tlhabi's text is that rather than merely pointing to the unequal system that shaped Mabegzo, she homes in on the people that lived near him – his friends, family, and the community of Orlando East. In an interview with PolitySA, when asked about crime in South Africa and how she relates that reality to the story of Mabegzo, Tlhabi gives a rather interesting response: she avers that as a society we cannot absolve ourselves of the crime that runs rampant when we consider the reality of the profound impact that human relationships have on an individual. Essentially, Tlhabi says as communities we cannot neglect and traumatise children and then turn around in horror when they become the criminals that terrorise us (PolitySA n.pag). The failure of communities to be accountable for how they shape their children, a critical issue raised by Tlhabi's text, often remains unaddressed. My analysis of *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of*

Healing argues that the township space is not only formed by political or economic structures, but also structures of relationality. I focus on the unique way in which Tlhabi has structured her autobiographical memoir to highlight the relational spaces she maps for the reader. I will examine the notion that the township is a socially textured space. Lastly, I will highlight the importance of the choices that occur within these relationships and the potential that these choices have for both harm and nurture, looking especially at the impact of relationships in the lives of Mabegzo, his mother Imelda and Tlhabi.

The Form of the Autobiographical Memoir and the Formation of Space in *Endings and Beginnings*

Tlhabi's *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing*, invites us into a particular kind of life writing: the autobiographical memoir, or simply memoir. There is some debate regarding whether memoir is subgenre of autobiography or a genre on its own,[9] and both terms seem acceptable for describing Tlhabi's work. For my purposes, however, the term memoir is most suited to understanding the conclusions I draw from the text. Distinguishing this text by genre is vital to my argument because the kind of text Tlhabi has written affects how the reader approaches it. The genre of memoir in particular, as we shall see, influences plot, pacing and characters in certain distinct ways. In English, according to Julie Rak, memoir "refers to the practice of physically recording memory – as in the word 'memorandum' – before an official arrangement of memories is made. But it is also a reference to the finished writing of 'memory'" (Rak 316). Rak gives this definition of memoir in an article where she attempts to make a case for memoirs being a separate genre to autobiography. The term 'memoir', she points out, existed at least a century prior to the coining of the term autobiography. Its long history, dating back as far as the 5th century BCE, draws our attention to what is peculiar about the work of memoir. G. Thomas Couser for instance says that "memoir presents itself, and is therefore read, as a nonfictional record or representation of actual humans' experience" (Couser 15). Since the memoir is bound to reality, what this also means then is that the text of memoir has certain constraints. Couser puts it like this: "[m]emoir's commitment to the real doesn't just limit its content (what it can be about), it also limits its narrative techniques (how the content can be presented) …This special relation to the real affects what memoir can do, too, not just what it is" (Couser 16). Emphasising these constraints draws our

[9] This is debated by scholars such as G. Thomas Couser, Ben Yagoda, Julie Rak and many others.

attention to the specific work that it does. In the case of Tlhabi's text, she has written a memoir that is primarily about someone else. Couser says that in such a case, the memoir falls into the subgenre of biography (Couser 18). Similarly to memoir, biography has had a long and contested history. Like memoir, this contested history revolves around biography being a kind of life-writing, and therefore claims to be representative of reality. To this Elizabeth Podnieks, quoting Susan Tridgell, says:

> [W]ithin the academy "biography remains surrounded by controversy" over epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic issues including the impossibility of capturing a life entire or a selfhood fully known to itself; invasion of privacy; fact vs. fiction; and the absence of a critical vocabulary and theoretical framework by which to judge the texts. (Podnieks 6)

Often what has been the case in the biography is that subjects are depicted as either messianic figures who can do no wrong or as villains who are pure evil. This misrepresentation has often tainted the genre and continues to make it contentious. For example, in the South African biography tradition, figures are often presented in ways that do not reflect to the complexity of real life. Ciraj Rassool mentions how in South African biographies, "[t]he history of a life tended to be approached as a linear human career formed by an ordered sequence of acts, events and works, with individuals characterised by stability, autonomy, self-determination and rational choice" (Rassool 29). Rassool critiques this approach rather harshly as he finds that it fails to accurately portray an individual or the events surrounding that individual's life. Whether Tlhabi was aware of this point of weakness in the genre or not, the way in which she structures her text addresses Rassool's concern.

In the opening of her text, Tlhabi is candid about her approach toward her subject. "This story is not only about a young man who shaped my life. It is not the celebration of a flawed human being, but a reflection of the contradictions of his being," she writes (Tlhabi vii). The way in which Tlhabi frames her text in these opening lines speaks to the way in which she is under no illusion concerning the flawed nature of her subject. It is an awareness that becomes more apparent as the narrative progresses, and what is perhaps even more striking is Tlhabi's perception of her own flaws as well. She becomes most keenly aware of her flaws when she reflects on her feelings for Mabegzo. When Tlhabi considers how she loved someone who embodied much of what she hated and still hates about society (violence, particularly toward

women), she allows herself to present the contradictions of her own being. Tlhabi finds a way to balance humanizing herself and Mabegzo whilst also maintaining a healthy suspicion of herself and this man whom she loved. This results in a very complex individual who is not altogether easy to read, but that is precisely the point. Tlhabi furthermore ties Mabegzo to herself, but also to his upbringing, the influence of his family and friends, the society he grew up in, and his own choices amid all these relationships. And she holds herself to similar standards. The end result is a refreshingly holistic approach to life-writing in general, and memoir in particular.

Tlhabi's memoir, as I have mentioned, is largely about someone else, situating it also as a sub-genre of biography. What this does is set up the text to address the notion precisely of relationships and their importance in an individual's life. By specifically writing a memoir that is biographical in nature, Tlhabi undercuts the notion of autonomous existence, and points instead to the way in which people are fundamentally shaped by the relationships. Tlhabi's story is bound up in a web of other stories, Mabegzo's being one of those stories. As she begins to uncover his life, she discovers a web of other narratives which have shaped Mabegzo.

It is this interconnectedness that seems to drive Tlhabi's unusual structuring of her text. The pronounced connections between people that Tlhabi describes, in drawing attention to the inner life of individuals, also addresses another lack in the genre of biography. Jonathan Hyslop, a scholar who responds to Rassool's critique of the biographical genre, notes along with Rassool how biographies often fixate on the public life of an individual and neglect the inner life (Hyslop 104). In trivializing the inner life, writers of biographies have supported the false notion that an individual's life is shaped largely by external politics, and that inner life is of little significance. Against these observations, *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing* enters the very heart of inner life through Tlhabi's interviews with friends, family, and acquaintances of Mabegzo. The way in which Tlhabi structures her text also points to the way in which the space that she is going to describe is made up of relationships. She prepares the reader for how she will map the township according to the weight of relationships and their formative nature.

The Social Texture of the Township

> My love for Soweto remains tinged with ambivalence. This township of my childhood is still a place where hearts break and dreams die, yet none who have grown up in Soweto can ever totally turn their back on it. I'm not the only professional who has migrated to the suburbs yet returns weekly to attend weddings and funerals and visit family. (Tlhabi 102)

Ambivalent as Tlhabi's feelings might be toward the township, she mentions in particular the idea of relationships as what continually draws her back to the space. In attending weddings, funerals and paying visits to family, she manifests a vested interest in those who occupy the space which she once called home. She notes that she is not the only one who continues with this ritual of returning to the township, but that it is in fact commonplace among young professionals. The reason for her return and the return of so many others is deeply social[10]. Tlhabi maps out this social element throughout her text. The social fibre of her community is often described in the form of a gathering, whether this gathering is around something negative or positive. We see this in the opening pages of the text when Tlhabi describes the way in which the community gathered around Mabegzo's dead body:

> I'm the only one here who cares about him, and I'm powerless to fend off the human vultures circling about his body, eager to kill him again and again…More people are gathering around his body. There's a lot of ululating…The onlookers are feasting their eyes just like they did with my father – poking him a bit, swinging his legs, wanting to see if he's really dead. (Tlhabi 1-2)

Here the community is gathered around the body of Mabegzo, who was loved by the young Redi Tlhabi but deeply hated by the community who felt terrorized by him. In the scene Tlhabi depicts, however, the community is seen as villainous. The 'human vultures', as Tlhabi calls them, are merciless in this moment. They are quite literally rejoicing over bloodshed. Mabegzo was a criminal, and for the community this moment is the vindication and justice they have waited for. But as Tlhabi points out, there were similar theatrics when the community gathered around her father's dead body – even if it was accompanied by

[10] When using the word social here, I use it to describe the relationships that exist between the people that live in the community of Orlando East (the township where Tlhabi and Mabegzo grew up).

"sorrow and shock, and neighbours and friends tried to keep order and control the crowd" (Tlhabi 2). Despite this showing of sorrow and shock for her father, there were still those "who turned [her] father's death into a circus" (Tlhabi 2). Although the community was slightly more respectful in the case of Tlhabi's father, they still gawked and gathered around his mutilated body and spread false stories about who he was (Tlhabi 2-3).

In both cases we see a dehumanizing of individuals that Tlhabi identifies especially during their deaths. The people ululating at the sight of Mabegzo's death have no regard for his family or for those who could be mourning for him; and there are similarities to the occasion of her father's passing. By showcasing the careless throwing around of words, and the careless way in which people engage with these bodies, Tlhabi sets the scene for an idea that dominates the narrative: the weight and influence of relationships. Tlhabi, especially through Mabegzo's life, will illustrate the dire influence that careless, indifferent, or cruel members of the community can have on individuals, particularly on children who depend on nurture and care.

It is important to note that Tlhabi does not haphazardly propose that the social interactions in the community are formed in some sort of vacuum – she is aware of the detrimental influence of the social order that was created by the apartheid government. She highlights this early on when she speaks about the Makabasa, a group of criminals of which Mabegzo was a part. According to Tlhabi, in the community, the Makabasa were considered legendary:

> They were not admired because the community had no values, but because they were daring young men in a township where men were emasculated by apartheid, and they ventured out to do unspeakable things that the more subdued wouldn't dream of doing even though they too were battling to put food on the table. (Tlhabi 34)

In the case of this gang, Tlhabi implicitly states that apartheid in some sense perpetuated the existence of these groups and their admiration within communities. The system, which emasculated young black men, meant that these men who were in fact criminals could be seen as heroes in their communities because they defied the law. In a context, "[w]here cruel racist laws were constantly being enacted to subjugate people, […] a sadistic killer could come to be viewed as a hero, a messianic figure even" (Tlhabi 37). Tlhabi points to the fact that the social order created by the apartheid system was in nature morally corrupt and had a

detrimental effect on the forming of communities. People were forced to accept things which under different circumstances they might not. As Dlamini notes however, "Tlhabi is not interested in clichés about the violence of place. She is interested in the violence that individuals commit and the possible reasons for that" (Dlamini, "Life Choices and South African Biography" 342). While Tlhabi acknowledges the reality of the political climate at the time, she does not look to politics for answers to every question she has about the decisions that Mabegzo made. And she is vindicated by the direction that her investigation takes: as she interviews Mabegzo's friends and family, she finds that what shaped Mabegzo's life had little to do with the apartheid system, in the sense that his daily decisions were not in the first place a response to apartheid but rather to other painful realities which he and his family experienced.

As Katlego tells Tlhabi, Mabegzo became who he was because of how the adults in his life responded to him. In other words, the way in which his community interacted with him impacted him in certain ways. Katlego witnessed the way in which the ill-treatment Mabegzo received changed him: "My mother didn't want me hanging out with Mabegzo. No parents wanted their kids to have anything to do with him. But I enjoyed his company. He was a good kid, you know. He was sweet and kind. The world turned him into something else" (Tlhabi 137). The allusions to the impact the community had on Mabegzo's life are scattered throughout the text, and we come to see that he was not the only one who was impacted by harmful interactions with members of his community – many others were too. But Tlhabi's community was not merely a group of human vultures that gathered only around death. They were also vibrant and creative:

> Soweto [Tlhabi says] was a wonderfully eclectic mix of languages, cultures and traditions…Although the apartheid government tried hard to segregate black people according to their ethnicity, their plan failed dismally. The different groups attended the same churches, migrated freely within the confines of the township and intermarried. (Tlhabi 14)

The dynamic interactions occurring in this space point to positive social interactions within the community. The fact that people chose to integrate with other cultures rather than following the segregationist laws of the apartheid government points to positive social encounters with one another. This is especially evident in the communal form of weddings:

> Weddings were my favourite Saturday activity, and around the festive season there could be as many as three weddings at once in our street alone. We would then move from one to the next, dancing and singing as we went. Everyone was invited to a wedding and those who weren't often came when they saw the celebrations and commotion on the streets. (Tlhabi 19)

In these glimpses into life in Soweto, we see the way in which the community was also able to gather around what was good. The jovial nature of the space and the open nature of the community were most pronounced in moments like this. Throughout the text, Tlhabi zooms in and out of such social interactions to map out the importance of relationships. She points to a social order that exists beyond public politics as she unravels the inner life and the everyday interactions that shape people, drawing attention to their potential for nurture as well as for harm.

***Endings and Beginnings*: Relationships in the Lives of Imelda, Mabegzo and Tlhabi**

A psychological study on the role of families in the development of caring demonstrates that:

> The capacity to be a caring individual is rooted, ultimately, in the experience of having been nurtured and cared for oneself in relationships. The most common pathway for the receipt of caring and nurturance resides within the context of the family, although alternative pathways are possible. (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag and Brooks-Gunn 518)

This is also evident in Tlhabi's text. Mabegzo is never the recipient of care and nurture within his family environment or beyond, and so the ability to care is never instilled in him. This is not to say that he lacks a capacity for care entirely. Tlhabi shows the ways in which he cared for her – but these moments of care are far and few between. The broken bond between him and his mother and the further estrangement he experiences within his family environment seem to shape him profoundly. Tlhabi describes Mabegzo's estrangement from his mother especially as a kind of death:

> It was a death, I think quietly to myself, the death of the sacred bond between mother and child, the beginning of the social isolation that was to lead her child to a lonely,

> bloody death alone on a street corner. How is it that a single decision taken in a brief moment can set the trajectory for the rest of one's life? The decision to separate Mabegzo from his mother, it seems, ostensibly to secure and protect her marriage, had cost him his life. (Tlhabi 227)

This quiet thought is shared by Tlhabi toward the end of *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing*. She shares it in response to Imelda having told of the moment when Mabegzo was taken from her. Tlhabi describes this tragic moment as the severing of a vital relationship, even comparing it with death as she reflects on it alongside thoughts of the day on which she lost her father. "If he'd been fetched, would he have left dead men's eyes alone?" she ponders (Tlhabi 181). These reflections on how a single decision might have set the trajectory for Mabegzo's entire life points to the centrality of relationships in shaping not only people, but an entire place. The careless words of many in the community, though not the sole contributor to Mabegzo becoming a criminal, were weighty enough to cause irreparable damage in his life and by extension in the lives of many in the community who suffered violence from him. Would something have been different in Mabegzo's life had he been cared for more lovingly? Tlhabi, raised in a nurturing environment, can display care towards those around her, whereas Mabegzo, deprived of care and nurture, struggles to care for others. Of course, he cares for Tlhabi, but he certainly does not care for those he murders and rapes. Tlhabi brings to the fore the significant influence that family has on an individual, especially in the contrast between herself and Mabegzo. In the life of Imelda, she shows a bit of both.

Beyond the immediate family, Tlhabi also foregrounds the significance of the wider community- in the township – and the social networks that exist within that community, in shaping individuals and eventually a space. Whether people in these networks are aware of it or not, the way in which they relate to one another matters. We see the impact of these networks most clearly in the lives of Imelda, Mabegzo and Tlhabi. These relationships within the township community have the potential for harm or nurture depending on how the people existing within these networks interact with one another. Tlhabi conveys this throughout her text. Whether it is through highlighting behaviours and attitudes in the neighbourhood or in the family, she constantly emphasises the centrality of these relationships. For example, recalling her childhood, she writes:

> I loved playing outside with my friends but I was always happiest at home with my parents. I adored Papa and was proud of his constant presence in our lives. Few friends had a father like ours. Most fathers either regularly beat their wives or passed out drunk in the streets. Many of our friends didn't know their fathers and envied the way Papa played with us and made us yummy food to share with them. I was also proud of my mother, who was pretty and clever and worked as a nurse at Baragwanath Hospital. (Tlhabi 21)

The fact that Tlhabi was happiest at home with her parents, more so than when playing with friends, points to the very loving environment in which she grew up. This is further evidenced in her adoration for her father, who was a constant presence in their lives. This is flagged as significant not only in Tlhabi's life but also within her community. Her friends who knew her father envied Tlhabi because of the way he loved them. Her father's care and nurture here is contrasted with that of other fathers, who as described here were either absent or abusive. The care and nurturing that Tlhabi receives translates into a greater propensity to care for others when her father encourages her to befriend a girl whom she initially finds to be irritating:

> "Once, while I was hiding from her, my father took me aside.
> Why don't you want to play with Zanele?'
> 'She follows me everywhere, Papa. It annoys me.' '
> That's because she loves you. Sometimes, my baby, it's good to love someone just because they love you.' After that I loved her". (Tlhabi 18)

The idea, extrapolated from Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag and Brooks-Gunn, that children who are cared for and nurtured in the family are better able to care for others is illustrated in this moment that Tlhabi has with her father. He cares for her and in so doing, he teaches her to care for others. We see this care continuing in Tlhabi, particularly when her friend Zanele passes away. She sneaks off to the unveiling of the body and upon seeing her friend, this is her response:

> My throat was sore and heavy as if I'd swallowed a bag of oranges. People were singing hymns, everyone was crying, and some even collapsed in theatrical displays of

> grief…On my way home I hummed the hymn I'd just heard…It sounded good, but the oranges in my throat were still choking me. (Tlhabi 18-19)

Even as a young girl, though she may not have known how to process the moment, Tlhabi experiences grief over the loss of her friend. The experience shows the growth in caring. There may of course have been other factors too that influenced her capacity to care, but the fact that these loving acts by her father are so etched in her memory, even as she writes the text, points to how impactful the nurturing she received from him was.

Tlhabi's relationships went beyond the scope of her family. There was also the influence of friends and neighbours. One of the prevalent issues of the day which Tlhabi and many young people in the township were exposed to was that of violence, particularly violence toward women, as we have already seen in the previous chapter on Mohale Mashigo's novel. Tlhabi writes: "Violation of women and girls was commonplace in the late eighties and early nineties. Yet as horrendous as it was, the community seemed to treat rape as if it were just some minor inconvenience" (Tlhabi 39). This harrowingly trivial treatment of rape points to how common it was. Another disturbing aspect of rape in the community was that women were largely held responsible for its occurrence. In Tlhabi's township, the onus was rarely placed on the men who raped. Tlhabi shares how,

> [i]t wasn't uncommon for a young woman to be walking down the street and for someone, even another woman, to point at her and snigger, 'Phela, this one got raped by so-and-so'. So-and-so would be a well-known thug still roaming the streets without a care in the world. (Tlhabi 39)

This callous attitude toward rape is unfortunately commonplace in South Africa. Author and literary scholar Pumla Gqola comments on these attitudes, which are still prevalent in South African today, in her book *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. She asks, "[i]f South Africans generally are opposed to rape, then why does it continue to be such a huge part of everyday life, with so few interventions? Why is rape so often met with disbelief, second-guessing and invitations to keep it under wraps?" (Gqola 21). In asking these questions, she immediately points to the hypocrisy of South African society, where there is a consensus that rape is a terrible injustice that should not be tolerated and yet it is tolerated by this very society. In highlighting the hypocrisy Gqola describes not only the attitude of South African society, but

also points to a culture of rape that is upheld by that society. In Gqola's view, these attitudes lead to a culture where rape is accepted as something inevitable –a part of the fibre of society (Gqola 9). It is this culture that we see highlighted in the quote above from Tlhabi's text. The fact that it was not uncommon for women to slight other women who had been raped, as if the rape were some fault of their own, points to problematic attitudes within the township. What Tlhabi further illustrates through Mabegzo's life is that these attitudes have real consequences. Mabegzo's life is an illustration of the havoc that can be wreaked by the harmful culture that "stigmatises [rape] survivors" (Gqola 21).

Tlhabi also shows what such attitudes normalise. During the 1980s, when she was growing up, one thing that it normalized was gang-rape, also known as 'jackrolling'. In this act of sexual violence, a group of men would kidnap a woman, in broad daylight, and she would be raped repeatedly, and eventually (when they were ready to do so) they would release her. Tlhabi mentions how as a young girl, she lived in fear of rape every day of her life and until this day, the fear has not left her entirely (Tlhabi 40). Growing up in Soweto in the 80s, the idea that any day she could be raped was not some far off idea but a reality that could occur at any time, and Tlhabi mentions instances where she narrowly escaped such harm (Tlhabi 42 & 47).

Quite clearly, Tlhabi condemns this form of violence. Throughout her text she critiques the harmful attitudes of the community that perpetuate violence. These careless views are more damaging than those perpetuating them may believe. This is clearly seen in the case of Mabegzo, at whom the "[a]dults were always pointing fingers" (Tlhabi 137). Mabegzo was stigmatised as a child because he was a product of rape. The adults in the community would mistreat him as if it were somehow his choice to be born of rape. As Katlego goes on to say, this affected Mabegzo deeply. And here we do well to note that Mabegzo's home environment is unlike Tlhabi's. Where Tlhabi at least had a loving family environment in which she found safety and comfort when the broader community did not offer it, Mabegzo did not: "Mabegzo said his life had been fine until the adults destroyed it" (Tlhabi 74). This accusation of Mabegzo makes sense when Tlhabi unpacks his story. One of the things that Mabegzo revealed to Tlhabi directly about his life was how he experienced relationships with members of his family:

> He had always sensed a certain distance and disconnect from his family, he told [Tlhabi]. Although they were mostly civil to him, they weren't loving or affectionate. Even his little cousins weren't keen to share their toys with him, and would walk off saying, 'My mommy said I mustn't play with you.' His grandmother was always trying to make things better for him, and he loved her for it, although even she couldn't save him from the world. But his grandfather never spoke to him directly. (Tlhabi 75)

This family dynamic is a complete contrast to that of Tlhabi's, where there was intimacy, love, and affection. As far as Mabegzo understood it, it was only his grandmother who truly loved him. Again, here we see the effects of careless attitudes that the adults in his life had. His aunts, who told their children not to play with him, were part of the chorus that repeatedly told Mabegzo that something was wrong with him because he was a child of rape. The cold attitude that the only father-figure he had in his life (his grandfather) had toward him ultimately affects Mabegzo as it is after a fight with his grandfather that he is kicked out of his grandfather's house (Tlhabi 130). This further estrangement and rejection impacts Mabegzo greatly and seems to then solidify his commitment to a life of crime. Now as Dlamini rightly points out "[a]s particular as Mabegzo's case was, it was not that unique. So why did he do the things he did? Why did many other boys (with backgrounds similar to or different from his) choose or not choose as he chose?" (Dlamini, "Life Choices and South African Biography 342). This question that Dlamini asks is important and perhaps to some extent unanswerable, as he goes on to say. However, Tlhabi's exploration of relationships sheds light on some of the choices Mabegzo made.

A relationship which affects Mabegzo, for all his days it seems, is the relationship with his mother. Her absence in Mabegzo's life seems to have been his ultimate undoing. As Tlhabi states: "He thought [Imelda] didn't love him because [she] had been violated" (Tlhabi 184). Because of this perpetual feeling of rejection, Tlhabi posits, "He was on a mission to destroy his enemies, and especially the men who wronged [his mother]" (Tlhabi 183). Again, here we are reckoning with the perpetuation of violence: Mabegzo himself is a product of violence and in turn he becomes a perpetrator of this very violence. Through this Tlhabi points to the cyclic nature of the violence in the township space. The ongoing violence gives birth to more violence. And although Tlhabi certainly cites the larger political conditions that made such violence possible, she is not satisfied with it as a sole cause, especially when Imelda's story also carries within it the notion of the impact that the relationships in a community can have.

The response that the community has toward the issue of rape is something Tlhabi scrutinizes deeply. The careless attitude that blames victims and hardly holds perpetrators to account adds to the harm of violence. We are made keenly aware of this harm in Imelda's life. After Imelda is raped, she too (like her son) is stigmatised by the community. This is seen quite clearly when Imelda's mother takes her to church for the first time after she was raped. "[A]s soon as [she] stepped out of the gate, [she] realised that the world had changed. Neighbours staring and pointing at [her] as [she] walked to church with [her] family… [She] was so happy to be able to go back to church, but when [she] got there everyone was talking about [her]" (Tlhabi 186). Instead of support from the community, Imelda is met with stares and gossip. Instead of comfort, she is shamed. She is referred to as 'ruined' by her own mother, already displaying how entrenched certain attitudes around rape were (Tlhabi 187). When her mother conveys this to the other mothers at church, she is in some sense ashamed of her own daughter because of her having been raped. This inverted sense of shame is all too often to the detriment of victims, as perpetrators should feel shame for their atrocious act and yet as we see here, victims feel the shame. Victims believe themselves to have done something wrong, and this is the attitude Tlhabi critiques. Ideas held by the community have consequences. The consequences are made visible in the lives of Mabegzo and his mother. "[The] behaviour of the adults towards Mabegzo while he was growing up, who were unaware that every day their words, deeds and indifference towards him stung, and ultimately gave rise to a monster" (Tlhabi 166).

Here, Tlhabi drives home the idea that individuals in communities have a responsibility to fellow members of the community. Ideas held by individuals shape lives, neighbourhoods and communities in certain ways. The narrative illustrates this further in the life of Imelda. The casual behaviours and attitudes held by the community come to bear directly on her life. The community's gossiping and ill-motivated inquisition into Imelda's state after she is raped adds to the horrific reality that she as a young girl was already living in. Imelda recalls how, "There were people who used to visit [them] just so they could see for themselves if [she] was pregnant" (Tlhabi 187). To keep Imelda from prying eyes, her mother hid her; whether this hiding was driven by that alone or was also a way for her mother to cope is hard to say. Eventually Imelda is moved by her mother to Lesotho to be with relatives and (supposedly) to protect her from prying eyes in Soweto. Of course, in Lesotho there are people too, but it seems that this community is far more welcoming to Imelda: "When we entered the yard,

about thirty visitors had come to welcome us – mainly women and children, but a few men as well" (Tlhabi 194). This scene is clearly contrasted with the attitudes and behaviours of Imelda's neighbours in Soweto. Even though she initially perceived the people as being curious about her state and uncaring like her previous community, she soon discovers that this community is different. The narrative suggests that the community in Lesotho is more generous and accommodating but does not provide any reasons for this. The mothers in the community and particularly her aunt Mme Moipone cared for Imelda and they were kind to her (Tlhabi 197). This nurture is something that Imelda is fortunate enough to experience and it continues in her life when she meets her husband and her in-laws who love her deeply (Tlhabi 231). Imelda was fortunate to receive nurturing in her life, but the same cannot be said about her son. From the moment he was taken from her, it seems that his life unravelled and continued to do so until the day he died. Tlhabi draws our attention to the fact that it was the decisions that adults in Imelda and Mabegzo's life made that led to his undoing. Tlhabi later reflects on these careless decisions:

> I just cannot accept that the adults, those self-appointed adjudicators of who may stay and who may not, who may speak and who will be silenced, were so profoundly arrogant as to challenge the might of providence and overrule the natural kinship bond between him and his mother. (Tlhabi 198)

The breaking of this relationship had dire consequences which these adults perhaps could not have anticipated but for which they were in part to blame. Tlhabi narrative demonstrates clearly that relationships, whether in his immediate family, with neighbours or within the larger community, had a dramatic influence on his life. Her text also suggests that communities cannot continue to hold certain ideas, such as harmful and commonly held narratives around rape, and then be surprised when those ideas manifest negatively. As she says, traumatizing children, and then being surprised when they grow up to be terrors in the community, exposes the hypocrisy of such thinking. Communities must be held to account, Tlhabi suggests they must reckon with the attitudes and behaviours that they embrace as well as their possible consequences. In more general terms, Tlhabi points to the reality that relationships shape individuals.

Conclusion

It follows that, relationships between people are vital to the make-up of the township space. While I argued in analysing Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* that a lack of agency may hinder individual choices, within a precarious environment such as the township people still do need to make decisions. Whether these decisions are the best possible decision for their lives is dependent on several aspects. *Dog Eat Dog* emphasises external changes in social structures over which characters have little control. When these structures improve, people are afforded the option of making better decisions. Tlhabi's text, however, says something quite different about the township space, namely that many decisions are dependent on relationships. Family relationships, friendships, and relationships with neighbours. Tlhabi points us to the reality that even during politically tumultuous times such as the height of apartheid, relationships within the community dramatically affect the decisions people make. Tlhabi points us to the reality that seemingly inconsequential attitudes, decisions, and behaviours by people in relationships with one another have consequences. These consequences can be enabling if the relationships are nurturing but they can also be detrimental when the relationships are harmful. What is particularly insightful about Tlhabi's memoir is that this focus on relationships is not necessarily an idea she proposes from the outset but is rather an idea that emerges from her investigation of Mabegzo's story.

She finds in Mabegzo a deeply complex individual, and when she attempts to uncover why he is the way that he is, she finds that he has been shaped by others. The notion is compelling. The township is a social place. Social relations between people form the very DNA of the township. Though Tlhabi does not deny the heavy influence of more public politics, she does point to the importance of the domestic politics of the home, of friendships and neighbourhoods. The importance of these relationships is amplified in Tlhabi's text, and the township is shown to be a significant social space.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I love you Soweto
I've done so long before
the summer swallow deserted you
I have bemoaned the smell of death
hanging on your neck like an albatross
I have hated the stench of your blood
blood made to flow in every street
but I have taken courage
in the thought that
those who mother your back
will carry on with the job
of building anew
a body of being
from the ashes in the ground

(Sipho Sepamla, "Soweto", ll. 45-58)

This ode to Soweto that the protest poet Sipho Sepamla wrote in 1978 carries sentiments about the township that ring true today in a general sense, and particularly in relation to the post-apartheid texts analysed in this thesis. The poet bemoans the "smell of death" and hates the stench of blood in the township, all the while carrying the hope that "those who mother [Soweto's] back / will carry on with the job / of building anew / a body of being / from the ashes in the ground" (Sepamla, lines 48-58). The texts I have analysed in this thesis portray something of what the poet laments about the township but also what he hopes for it. The image of the township as synonymous with a kind of death is picked up by Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*, which is set at the start of South Africa's democracy. The text, as I have shown, decries the lack of economic transformation in the township in this new political dispensation. Mhlongo depicts the township as a space that does not get to taste the sweet rewards of freedom promised in the new South Africa. This is clearly portrayed in the protagonist Dingz who, like a donkey that is ever-reaching for the carrot on a stick, is found ever-reaching for the promises of freedom but never obtaining them. Through what seems to be an endless string of defeats and very short-lived victories, what Mhlongo brings to bear is the reality of Dingz's precarious life. Mhlongo suggests that such an uncertain existence results in desperate decisions, decisions which ultimately showcase a lack of agency. In showing Dingz's complete lack of agency, Mhlongo points to the need for systems to change in order for those like Dingz to experience any meaningful change. Mhlongo's text critiques the idea of individual choices being what ultimately brings change. My argument points to the fact that for someone like Dingz to have agency, meaningful change will have to occur.

Larger, mainly economic, systems that are at play in Dingz's life need to transform. Through Dingz's lack of agency, the township is represented in this chapter as a site of deprivation.

It is fitting then that the next chapter, which looks at *The Yearning*, features a protagonist who has distanced herself from the township – from the deprivation of it all. However, it becomes apparent that this is not as simple as she might have expected. From the protagonist Marubini's initial flashbacks to the township, it becomes clear that the township was a space which she associated with happy childhood memories, where she was surrounded by a loving family. The chapter begins with a view of township as a site of childhood joy, but this joy comes to a shattering halt when the more painful parts of her childhood are revealed. The township quickly shifts to being a site of pain for the protagonist. It becomes clear that she has moved away from the township to escape the trauma which she experienced there as a child. The irony of the text is found later in the narrative in the fact that in order to heal from this pain, she must return to the township. I argue then at this point that the township becomes a site of restoration for Marubini. What the township space comes to mean for Marubini echoes in some sense the hope that the poet Sepamla had for Soweto as a place of much more than violence and death. While Mashigo's narrative tells a story of horror, it also carries a glimmer of hope at the end. This idea of the township embodying various meanings for an individual shows the township to be multi-faceted in nature. This is slowly uncovered through the way the township's meaning changes for the protagonist through her journey from pain towards healing.

I argue that this text acts as a kind of mirror for South Africa, pointing to how detrimental not dealing with trauma can be, but also offering the hope of healing when trauma is dealt with. Just like Marubini finds herself in a kind of stasis until she addresses the trauma of her past, so too South African society continues to be traumatized by the past until that past is properly dealt with. The township functions in the text (and outside of it) as a haunting presence that will not let Marubini or South Africa rest until the past is properly put to rest. The literary representation of the township in this text not only highlights the complexity of the township, but also the role that the township continues to play in asking questions of the present.

Finally, I look at Tlhabi's *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing*, which widens the lens of focus from one family to a community. It explores how the township is experienced in a more social sense. Where *The Yearning* focused on grief and trauma and the process of

restoration that followed as it pertained to one family, *Endings and Beginnings: A Story of Healing* widens the lens to speak of the implications of social networks that exist within a community. This memoir by Tlhabi points to the way in which the township is formed not only by geographical, political or even economic elements, but also by the very people who live there. Tlhabi gets her point across by telling the story of her childhood friend, who also happened to be a gangster. Tlhabi, in trying to uncover how Mabegzo could at once be a dear friend to her and a fiend to others, finds that it is not merely a series of bad decisions that turned Mabegzo into a criminal but also a series of uncaring relationships. Through Mabegzo she displays what happens to an individual who is not nurtured within the society they live in. Tlhabi looks at familial relationships, friendships, and wider relationships in Mabegzo's life and discovers that the community's careless treatment of him is in part responsible for the monster who later harassed them. Using the example of herself and of Imelda, Mabegzo's mother, Tlhabi also highlights the positive influence that nurturing relationships can have on an individual. Through these examples, she shares the hope that Sepamla speaks of that those who mother Soweto (essentially those who nurture), have the potential to shape this space for the good through wholesome relationships. Tlhabi in some sense interrogates communities by showing how commonly held ideas or attitudes which are harmful have an influence on others. The literary representation of the township, in this case, is largely focused on the social connections between people who inhabit the same space. While Mhlongo's text looks at how a space influences people, Tlhabi's text looks at how people influence a space, and at the consequences of this influence on an individual's life. The varied representations of the township in the texts I have analysed point to it as a space that is alive and shifting because of the various elements that give it meaning. It is perhaps this lively nature that has made of the township space a literary trope which is able to reflect a myriad of lived experiences, of which these texts are an example.

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